First Choice for a Second Chance: Factors Supporting Temporary Dropouts Who Re-Enroll in High School

Ralph Costen

University of Southern Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations

Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons, and the Educational Leadership Commons

Recommended Citation


https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/715

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by The Aquila Digital Community. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of The Aquila Digital Community. For more information, please contact aquilastaff@usm.edu.
FIRST CHOICE FOR A SECOND CHANCE: FACTORS SUPPORTING TEMPORARY DROPOUTS WHO RE-ENROLL IN HIGH SCHOOL

by

Ralph Costen

Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

December 2012
ABSTRACT

FIRST CHOICE FOR A SECOND CHANCE: FACTORS SUPPORTING TEMPORARY DROPOUTS WHO RE-ENROLL IN HIGH SCHOOL

by Ralph Costen

December 2012

The purpose was to identify what factors supported students reengaging in high school by correcting patterns of chronic absenteeism or re-enrolling in order to achieve the status of high school graduate. To identify these factors, the researcher relied on the qualitative approach of Grounded Theory as a guide to evaluate the results of the study. Nineteen students attending a traditional high school, a digital academy, or an adult education program were randomly selected from a pool of selected students who met the criteria for participation in the study. The selected students were interviewed by the researcher with questions focusing on what encouraged or supported a decision by the student to change their attendance patterns and align with the educational requirements to obtain a high school diploma. Student selection for participation in this study was conducted by the participating schools’ guidance counselors and was based on the students’ attendance data or their status of dropping out and re-entering high school. The results of the study regarding reasons for re-enrolling in school after dropping out included:

1. Most of the students left school during their sophomore year;

2. Top reasons listed by students for school disengagement were school factors, student factors, medical factors, and economic factors;

3. Many students had a strong self-preservation impulse;
4. Top reasons listed by students for returning to school were inner resiliency, an improved school environment, and support of family and significant others;

5. Family and friends were very important to re-enrolling students by providing moral and emotional supports;

6. Students took advantage of re-enrollment opportunities, if the process was easy to navigate; and

7. Students desired to be treated with fairness and consistency.
The University of Southern Mississippi

FIRST CHOICE FOR A SECOND CHANCE: FACTORS SUPPORTING TEMPORARY DROPOUTS WHO RE-ENROLL IN HIGH SCHOOL

by

Ralph Costen

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School of The University of Southern Mississippi in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved:

Dr. Rose Marie McNesse
Director

Dr. Tammy Greer

Dr. David Lee

Dr. Sharon Rouse

Dr. Susan A. Siltanen
Dean of the Graduate School

December 2012
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout my career as an educator working for 23 years in alternative education, many of my students participated in extended patterns of irregular attendance, participated in cycles of withdrawing and re-enrolling in school, or permanently dropping out of school; however, many survived the process. I would like to acknowledge their resiliency and determination.

I wish to thank sincerely my dissertation Chairperson, Dr. Rose Marie McNeese and other committee members Dr. Tammy Greer, Dr. David Lee, and Dr. Sharon Rouse for their guidance, support, and wisdom with the preparation on my dissertation.

For this task to have been possible, I needed the support of the wonderful and supportive members of my family: my wife, Patricia, and my two daughters, Reagan and Mallory. To my friends and family of the Oakwood Open Campus High School, thank you for the support, encouragement, and well wishes extended throughout this process. I wish also to thank my colleagues from North Cobb High School for their support and understanding. To the student participants and school staff in this study thank you for your participation, support, and guidance. Without the encouragement, and the emotional and psychological support from my family, friends, and colleagues, I would not have been able to complete this task. Thank you!
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ............................................................................................................................. ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ........................................................................................................ iv

LIST OF TABLES ....................................................................................................................... vii

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ....................................................................................................... viii

CHAPTER

I.  INTRODUCTION ..................................................................................................................1
   
   Overview
   Problem Statement
   Research Questions
   Significance of the Study
   Delimitations
   Definition of Terms
   Summary
   Study Organization

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE .........................................................................................16
   
   Introduction
   Background Information
   Causes of Chronic Absenteeism in Adolescent Students
   Summary

III. METHODOLOGY .............................................................................................................62
   
   Study Setting
   Research Design
   Participants
   Instrumentation
   Data Collection Procedures
   Summary

IV. INTRODUCTION ..............................................................................................................81
   
   Study Participants
   Qualitative Interpretation of Data
   Summary of Push-Pull and Reengagement Factors
   Research Question 1
Research Questions 2-4
Research Question 4
Research Questions 1-3
Research Question 2
Research Question 5
Summary

V. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....97

Summary
Research Questions
Conclusion and Discussion
Limitations
Recommendation for Practice and Policy
Recommendations for Future Research

APPENDIXES ........................................................................................................111

REFERENCES .......................................................................................................122
LIST OF TABLES

Table

1. Demographic Overview of Students (March 2009).................................63
2. Percentage of Students Meeting or Exceeding GHSGT Standards in 2008
   in the School District and State of Georgia........................................65
3. GHSGT Percent Passing by Ethnicity/Race in 2008..................................66
4. Demographic Profile of Students in Study..............................................74
5. Detailed Student Profile...........................................................................75
6. Push/Pull Factors - Reasons Cited by Students for Chronic Absenteeism.....84
7. Reengagement Factors: Student Reasons for Returning to School .............85
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure

1. Depiction of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory
   Adapted from Ecological System Theory. (Paquette & Ryan 2001.) .......................22
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Overview

Increased accountability requirements placed on schools and educators by local, state, and federal agencies force schools to develop and implement adequate programs aimed at curbing student disengagement resulting from chronic student absenteeism. Principals in a 1998 survey identified absenteeism as a major discipline issue facing schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998). The passage of the (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002) by the federal government has responded to student absenteeism by enacting accountability requirements to which schools must respond. (NCLB, 2002) required states to report truancy rates by school beginning with the 2005–2006 school year.

The reasons why students do not attend school regularly or complete their schooling lack clarity. In 2007, The National High School Center estimated 1.2 million high school students in the United States did not complete their schooling and graduate with their class. Although this number varies widely depending on the research source, the educational community realizes when students drop out of school a serious issue exists (Chait & Lazarin, 2008). The U.S. Department of Education (2008) reconfirmed the seriousness of the problem by stating, “Of 20 children born in 1983, six did not graduate from high school on time in 2001” (p. 1).

Bridgeland, Dilulio, and Morison (2006) reported that several theories and explanations offer partial insights, but no clear and definitive truism exists for this human condition. What research does support is the premise that dropping out of school is a
slow process taking several years to reach culmination (Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2004; Hauser & Koenig, 2010). During this process, students begin disengaging from school. The slow process of dissatisfaction by students starts the cycle of disengagement. The students usually act out with irregular patterns of attendance leading to extended periods of sporadic attendance over several years. The disengaged student, or re-enrollee, had numerous excused, unexcused, or partial day absences officially recorded prior to complete withdrawal from school. In addition, student absences went unrecorded and un-noticed by school officials and parents until they had completely withdrawn from school (DeKalb, 1999). The process eventually ended with some of these students completely and permanently withdrawing from school for a variety of reasons (Entwisle et al., 2004; Hauser & Koenig, 2010). Because of the slow process of disengagement from school, many opportunities existed to recover these students prior to their exiting.

A large body of research literature examined the causes and effects of student disengagement and the affect on students, schools, families, and communities (Berliner, Barrat, Fong, & Shirk, 2008). In contrast, the researchers on this topic have just begun to examine why and how students reengage or re-enroll in school. The urgency to begin a dialogue on student disengagement so that educators may address the problem of student dropouts, looms for all educators. Levy (2008) reported that student disengagement expressed by student chronic absenteeism, occurs more often than drug use by students in the United States.

National Statistics

Harold Levy (2008), Chancellor of New York City schools, discovered the full scope of the problem of school disengagement while visiting one of his schools within
the largest school district in the country. On a visit to a New York City high school Levy (2008) “stumbled upon the pervasiveness of a widespread problem in our city’s educational system: truancy and the tendency of schools to hide it, particularly in the higher grades” (p. 86). Levy (2008) shared that truancy might be the reason why schools fail, but school districts throughout the country continued to release misleading and inconsistent attendance data. Levy (2008) also indicated that the public and other professionals are unaware of the magnitude of truancy in the country, and it was continuing to grow because of the lack of accurate data.

According to Malbon and Nuttal (1982), almost one-third of students missed an average of at least one class per day, 100 classes per year, or 18 full days. Malbon and Nuttal (1982) suspected that absentee rates of 15% were common, especially in urban areas and sometimes were much higher. As early as the 1970s and in the 1980s de Jung and Duckworth (1985) shared their concerns about the inability of schools and districts to understand the full breadth and depth of chronic student absenteeism.

Truancy continued to be a problem into the 1990s. Based on a study conducted in Washington State, Harding and Burley (1998) reported that 34% of its students were out of school with 20 or more absences during that year. Christie (2006) found that more than 50,000 of the students in Tennessee were absent from school daily. Another example of the prevalence of truancy in major cities was revealed in a study using data from school years 2002–2003 to 2004–2005. The study reported the average unexcused absences per year ranged from just under six for elementary school students to more than eight for middle school students, and to approximately 17 for high school students.
Almost 20% of all Denver Public Schools students missed at least 10 days without a valid excuse, causing them to meet the legal definition of *truant* in Colorado (Christie, 2007).

Levy (2008) reported high levels of chronic and casual truancy in the country and found truancy was more pervasive than drug abuse with more dire social consequences. Other studies conducted between 1983 and 2008 showed similar results. A nationwide study conducted by the National Center for School Engagement (2007) revealed high school students missed approximately 10% of their school days every year. For example, the following list details statistics from several municipalities and states across the United States:

1. The Los Angeles Unified School District reported 10% of students were absent daily (DeKalb, 1999);
2. Research studies consistently report double-digit absentee rates for urban inner-city schools with approximately 8% of these students labeled as chronically truant (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002);
3. Wisconsin reported 31.1% of the total absences during the 1998-1999 school year were due to truancy (Wisconsin Legislative Audit Bureau, 2000);
4. In 2006 New York City schools, recorded 34% of their students were absent for the equivalent of a month each year, with typically 30% of the City’s students (1.1 million students) involved in active truancy investigations annually (Levy, 2008); and
5. For 2010, 6.7% of all students in the state of Georgia were absent over 15 days during that school year (Georgia Department of Education Report Card, 2009).

Data reported during the past 28 years (Malbon & Nuttal, 1982; Georgia Department of Education Report Card, 2009) illustrated that chronic absenteeism has
remained constant. Levy (2008) reported the importance of the statistic when compared to other student issues of concern, as the truancy rate greater than the nation’s student dropout rate. Similar data were reported in the state of Georgia (Georgia Department of Education Report Card, 2009)

**Georgia Statistics**

Although Georgia’s truancy rates reflect national patterns, the state of Georgia has shown some improvement. According to Kelderman (2004) and the Georgia Department of Education Report Card (2009), Georgia’s truancy rates decreased to 6.7% in 2010 from 14% in 2004. Between 2009 and 2010, the number of students with more than 15 days absent rose 9.7% (Barge, 2011). In addition, the Georgia Department of Education (2009) reported a substantial decrease in student graduation rates for the 2007 cohort of ninth graders, while excessive absences were revealed for 8th, 9th, and 10th grade students. In Georgia, 9th students missing 11 to 14 days of instruction, which equated to an estimated graduation rate slightly more than 25% and was slightly higher than 18% for 10th grade students (McGiboney, 2011).

**Problem Statement**

The purpose of this study was to examine factors influencing students’ decisions to change their patterns of school disengagement to school reengagement, by re-enrolling, in high school prior to aging out at age 21 for students who were not receiving special education services and age 22 for students receiving special education services. Student disengagement from school occurs when the student is truant, chronically absent, temporarily drops out, or permanently drops out from school. Students displaying negative behaviors such as irregular attendance patterns or extended absences in an
educational setting are disengaged from school and considered at risk. Baker, Sigmon, and Nugent (2001); Hanewald (2011); Henry and Huizinga (2007); and Looker and Thiessen (2008) explained at-risk students who are likely to be disengaged from school are those who have been exposed to negative risk factors or conditions, such as low social class, large families associated with poor child rearing practices, poor neighborhoods, or similar conditions. According to Looker and Thiessen (2008), the majority of these at-risk students will completely withdraw from school. Entwisle et al. (2004) described a dropout as a student who withdraws from school prior to receiving a high school diploma or the General Educational Development equivalency diploma/certificate, commonly known as the GED, by the age of 22. However, according to Entwisle et al. (2004) some of these students are not true dropouts because they will reengage in their schooling after extended periods of absences.

The purpose of this research study was to seek an understanding of why students reengage in school after displaying patterns of chronic absenteeism or completely dropping out of school. The researcher found very little literature on this specific topic conducted in the United States, but much was located that focused on international studies. Almeidi, Johnson, and Steiner (2006); Berliner et al. (2008); Chuang (1997); Looker and Thiessen (2008); and Jordan, McPartland, and Lara (1999) also reported a shortage of research on why some of these students reengage and return to school even though, upon returning, they continued to confront the push and pull forces that initially caused them to disengage from school. Entwisle et al. (2004) and Epstein and Sheldon (2002) concluded that most studies conducted in this area did not examine the emotional status of students prior to disengagement from school. Both groups of researchers
concurred that very little evidence existed on what motivates students to return to school after long periods of non-attendance and what institutional barriers existed that hindered a student’s return to school.

The intention of this dissertation study was to add to the current available knowledge on what motivates students to reengage in high school and to examine the barriers faced by these students as they attempt to earn high school credentials. Understanding why these students return to school is essential to understanding why they leave and what educators may be able to do to prevent students from disengaging and eventually dropping out of school. The subjects of this study included American high school students who had disengaged and then reengaged in school before their opportunity to attend high school timed out.

A body of research is emerging that focuses on students seeking reengagement to high school with the intention to complete the requirements to earn graduation credentials and become high school completers. Researchers recognized that some students return to high school after displaying extended periods of absences or who had completely withdrawn from school (Almeidi et al., 2006; Berliner et al., 2008; Entwisle et al., 2004; Looker & Thiessen, 2008). Entwisle et al. (2004) identified these students as temporary dropouts. Others, such as Berliner et al. (2008), labeled these students as re-enrollees. Looker and Thiessn (2008) referred to them as second chance youth. Almeidi et al. (2006) concluded, “In a society that values individual reinvention and multiple makeovers, it seems a given that young people who drop out of high school should have a second chance” (p. 1).

For the purpose of this study, students re-enrolling and reengaging in school
were referred to as *re-enrollees, temporary dropouts, or second chance youth*. A large suburban school district located in the southeastern region of the United States consented for students and administrators to participate in this study and provided additional information for the research. A condition of the research was not to name the school district or the students who participated in the study. To honor the agreement with the school district to remain anonymous, for the purpose of the study the participating school district was referred to as the *Second Chance School District* (SCSD).

Students’ motivation for changing their patterns of extended absenteeism or temporary withdrawal by re-enrolling in a traditional or an alternative educational setting and completing their education warrants additional investigation. This research collected information on why disengaged students, who dropped out of school or displayed patterns of chronic absenteeism, returned to school. Answers to the research questions were obtained through student questionnaires and interviews. The study population consisted of high school students attending (a) a traditional high school, (b) an open campus digital alternative high school setting, or (c) an adult education program where students temporarily dropped out of school or have displayed patterns of chronic absenteeism. All students selected for the study were 18 years or older. Five research questions were developed to guide the research process.

**Research Questions**

This study addressed the central question: What major influences caused students, who were once temporary dropouts, to reengage in high school? Additional guiding questions included:
1. Do environmental, social, or structural factors encourage students to re-enroll in school?

2. Do peer groups influence temporary dropouts to return to school?

3. Do demographics influence a change of status from temporary dropout to graduate?

4. Does the school’s culture and structure influence temporary dropouts to re-enroll?

5. Do dropout prevention programs influence temporary dropout student decisions to re-enroll and complete high school?

Significance of the Study

School characteristics can lead to students disengaging, completely withdrawing, or establishing a pattern of temporarily dropping out of school for extended periods of time; thereby, resulting in negative consequences for the student or the student’s family, school, community, state, and the nation (Entwisle et al., 2004). The initial impact of the negative consequences of these student behaviors can be obvious in the short term, but the long-term impact may be incalculable for all influenced by them. Consequently, a study of why students adopt a pattern of temporary dropout status and how to assist students in changing these patterns of behavior warrants investigation by the educational community for several reasons.

First, there is little research literature on this how students make the transformation from disengagement to earning a high school diploma (Entwisle et al., 2004). Understanding why students develop patterns of chronic absenteeism or truancy can provide a baseline of information that the educational community may begin to
develop approaches to intervene or correct the behaviors of students that are prevalent in schools and associated with disengagement. Secondly, to maintain the country’s competitiveness in the world economy, a strong educational system that prepares highly skilled graduates is essential. Reducing the number of temporary dropouts would mitigate many of the negative outcomes associated with this behavior and could benefit the student, the school, and the community.

Addressing issues associated with negative attendance patterns requires an understanding of the dynamics and complexities leading students to participate in a detrimental pattern of slowly disengaging from the educational process by the educational community. Researchers are beginning to realize that for every student who contemplates or actually withdraws from school, there could be several underlying reasons used by the student to justify his or her actions (Berliner et al., 2008). Some reasons given for student disengagement were personal decisions and institutional and environmental causes, while others were social, behavioral, or economical reasons. To begin to address and correct the issues of disengagement and chronic absenteeism, educators must have an understanding of the conditions students use to justify their decision to withdraw from school.

Berliner et al. (2008) suggested that conditions supporting dropouts have gotten much attention; however, the critical issue of students returning to school, which he labeled re-enrollment (reengagement), lacks adequate study and debate. For example, what characteristics do these students possess? How did they acquire them? When did they develop them? Without understanding, development of programs or strategies encouraging student reengagement could fail.
Delimitations

The setting for this study was a large suburban school district near a major metropolitan area located in the southeastern region of the United States. To protect the anonymity of the participating school district, the researcher referred to the school district as Second Chance School District (SCSD). Because of the SCSD’s location and demographics, results of the study may not be generalizable to other regions or school districts. The study was further delimited by school setting, age of students, and students’ circumstances related to school attendance. The school settings included high school students enrolled in a traditional high school, an open campus digital alternative school, or an adult education facility for students. Students ranged in age from 18 years to 21 years for traditional students and 22 years for students with a special education ruling. The circumstances related to students’ school attendance included those who had temporarily dropped out of school and later reengaged in school and those who displayed patterns of chronic absenteeism. Student data were not disaggregated by race, gender, or socio-economic level.

Definition of Terms

Aging out. Schools require students to finish their high school studies prior to them reaching a certain age, typically at the end of their 21st birthday (Heilbrunn, 2007).

Alternative schools. This term broadly refers to public schools that states or school districts establish to serve populations of students who are not succeeding in the traditional public school environment. The U.S. Department of Education (2002) defined an alternative school as:
A public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides nontraditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education, or vocational education. (p. 55)

Alternative schools offer students who are failing academically or may have learning disabilities or behavioral problems opportunities to achieve in a less formal setting. In addition, alternative schools are often characterized by their flexible schedules, smaller teacher-student ratios, and modified curricula.

**Chronic absenteeism.** For the purpose of this study, chronic absenteeism was defined as the condition of a student’s school attendance, when the student has not attended school during the school day for one or more periods for at least 10 days in a given semester. The absences may be excused or they may be truant; however, what they had in common was the extended period of time that a student was not present in the school building (Williams, 2008).

**Grounded Theory.** Jones and Alony (2011) defined Grounded Theory as a means of assembling and sorting concepts by looking for saturation of patterns. The approach is used to investigate and explore socially related issues permitting flexibility and freedom in data interpretation. The approach has the advantage of reserving the need for the researcher to conceive preliminary hypotheses (Jones & Alony, 2011). Borgatti (1996) explained that researchers applying the Grounded Theory approach see observation as whole cases and not as variables. Borgatti (1996) added the foundation of grounded theory research is to use field notes based on observations, to discover or label variables
as categories, concepts and properties and theorize about the interrelationships of the variables.

*Permanent dropout.* A student withdrawing from school prior to the age of 22 and does not receive a high school certificate of graduation or a GED from an accredited school (Entwisle et al., 2004).

*Re-enrollees/ Reengagement.* Students who drop out of school at least once but return to high school prior to aging out of the system are referred to as re-enrollees (Berliner et al., 2008).

*Student refusal behavior (SRB).* A psychological term used to describe the condition when students miss school resulting from a complex mix of emotional and social factors (Wimmer, 2008).

*Temporary dropout.* A student who may eventually return to school and earn either a high school certificate or GED before he or she reaches age 22 is known as a temporary dropout (Entwisle et al., 2004).

*The Ecology of Human Development.* A scientific study describing the progressive and mutual accommodations that exist between human development and the changing environments in which they interact defines the Ecology of Human Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

*Truancy.* Truancy is a term used by states when absences from school or classes are not excusable under state compulsory attendance laws (DeKalb, 1999).

**Summary**

This study was designed to gain an understanding of factors that help students make the decision to reengage in school by re-enrolling and continuing the quest towards
a high school diploma before aging out at the end of his or her 21st birthday year (Entwisle et al., 2004). The researcher investigated the factors or conditions that allowed students to make the successful transition from disengagement to earning a high school diploma. The study was designed to determine the conditions in the students’ lives that had the greatest influence on their decision to reengage and complete high school: (a) personal decisions, (b) peers, (c) family circumstances, (d) school culture, (e) intervention programs, (f) real life experiences, (g) punitive measures, or (h) other factors.

Understanding the process of transition from temporary dropout to the status of a high school completer is essential to the development of adequate policies to reduce chronic absenteeism. Adequate support programs assisting the transition of students in and out of the educational system could benefit both the student and the school system. Because of the accountability movement throughout the profession, adequate information and insight should be easily accessible and available, regardless of the location of the school district. Because no student should be left behind (NCLB, 2002), an understanding of why students disengage from school due to chronic absenteeism or truancy is an absolute must in order to increase learning opportunities available to them regardless of the geographic location or size of school districts.

Study Organization

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I contained the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, research questions, and definitions of terms. Chapter II contains a review of related literature that focused on chronic absenteeism or truancy, causation factors of student truancy, and school
disengagement and reengagement. Terms such as *alternative education, attendance, chronic absenteeism, compulsory, decision-making, school disengagement, school reengagement, and truancy*, were key search words for this study. Truancy was found to be highly suspect in influencing high school dropout rates, potential criminal behavior, future limited earnings, and other related social issues. The literature review was limited in establishing statistical linkages with chronic absenteeism/truancy and student re-enrollment in high school. A description of the research procedures, subjects, instruments, and methodology used to address the research questions is included in Chapter III. A description of the data collected and the findings of the analyses are presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V contains the conclusion, implications, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine what factors influence students’ decisions to change their patterns of chronic absenteeism and become high school completers prior to aging out. This study investigated how these students made the transition from potential permanent dropout to high school completers and what condition in these students’ lives had the greatest influence on their decision: personal decisions, peers, family circumstances, the school culture, intervention programs, real life experiences, or punitive measures helped make the decision to re-enroll. Understanding the process of transitioning from temporary dropout status to a permanent dropout status is essential to the development of chronic absenteeism/truancy reduction and intervention programs. Prior to concluding why a student decides to reengage and re-enroll in school, the researcher should investigate the reasons students reached the point of making the decision to dropout in the first place. According to Jordan, McPartland, and Lara (1999) chronic absenteeism and disengagement is a slow process of push and pull events occurring in the students’ lives (Entwisle et al., 2004).

Chapter II focuses on an examination of the slow process of disengagement from school by students. Studies have recognized that a host of factors influences students’ decision to disengage from school by being chronically absent or truant from school (Dekalb, 1999; Entwisle et al., 2004; Jordan et al., 1999). These factors include personal decisions by students, peer pressures, socioeconomic conditions, cultural norms, school-
related conditions, legal issues, or neighborhood structural conditions (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Chang & Romero, 2008; Heilbrunn, 2007; Levy, 2008).

Chapter II examines five areas: (a) risk factor or risk factors associated with irregular patterns of chronic absenteeism school (disengagement), (b) historical and governmental influences, (c) Adolescent Development Theory developed by Bronfenbrenner (1977), (d) student resiliency, and (e) the impact of intervention programs on student reengagement. The review provides a broad overview of (a) problems associated with student disengagement and chronic absenteeism, (b) theories explaining why students become chronically absent and disengaged, (c) efforts to reduce truancy, and (c) conditions under which students return to school. This study was conducted to gain a better understanding of risk factors and factors used to identify chronically absent students within the context of adolescent development theory as a framework to examine the causes of chronic absenteeism in adolescent students.

Background Information

No one descriptor can fully explain why students engage in the destructive behavior of negative attendance patterns. However, early researchers assumed that absenteeism was a result of a singular risk factor (Corville-Smith, Ryan, & Dalicandro, 1998) or they contended that students simply tired of school and elected not to attend (Dube & Orpinas, 2009). For this review, risk factors was used as the general term to describe those circumstances or situations to explain why students may be chronically absent from school. Reis, Colbert, and Hebert (2005) defined risk factors as variables that promote negative outcomes. Current research has shown this assumption is false.
Henry and Huizinga (2007) found that several school-related risk factors of chronic absenteeism and truancy were related to school performance and involvement with delinquent peers. However, other research presented a broader view of factors related to chronic absenteeism and truancy (Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Kearney, 2008). Corville-Smith et al. (1998) and Kearney (2008) identified several risk factors associated with students who were identified as either being chronically absent/truant, temporary dropouts, second chance students, or re-enrollees. Research organizations, such as the National Center for School Engagement (2006) and The National Center for Education Statistics (1998), have identified several common risk factors that act in combination to create an environment that enables students to behave in a manner leading to irregular patterns of school attendance and disengagement. At the federal level, the U.S. Department of Education (1996) used the following framework to document the factors that contributed to truancy:

1. School factors
   i. School safety,
   ii. School size,
   iii. Attitudes of school staff and fellow students,
   iv. Flexibility in meeting students’ diverse learning styles,
   v. Failure to notify parents/guardians successfully about each absence, and
   vi. Lack of consistency and uniformity of attendance and attendance policies within schools and districts

2. Family factors
   i. Lack of parent supervision and/or guidance,
   ii. Poverty,
iii. Substance abuse.

iv. Domestic violence,

v. Lack of familiarity with school attendance laws, and

vi. Varied education priorities;

3. Economic factors

i. Student employment,

ii. Single-parent households,

iii. Parents with multiple jobs, and

iv. Families that lack affordable transportation and/or child care;

4. Student factors

i. Substance use,

ii. Limited social and emotional competence,

iii. Mental health problems,

iv. Poor physical health,

v. Lack of familiarity with school attendance laws,

vi. Teen pregnancy, and

vii. Truant friends.

Because of the extensive list of risk factors contributing to truancy, it is difficult to isolate a single cause of chronic absenteeism. As a result, research practitioners have not been able to provide a definitive theory or framework explaining why students are chronically absent or truant from school. Nor does the current body of literature establish the relationship of the risk factors and their relative relationships to causing chronic absenteeism (Bradshaw, 2008; Hammond, 2007; Henry & Huizinga, 2007). To
complicate student chronic absenteeism further, different disciplines have isolated or identified risk factors or stressors that either cause or create an environment for the occurrence of chronic absenteeism and truancy in the schools (Bradshaw, 2008). Also, several researchers have attempted to understand the many risk factors associated with student disengagement to determine why students become chronically disengaged from school (Bradshaw, 2008; Hammond, 2007; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 1996).

Causes of Chronic Absenteeism in Adolescent Students

*Developmental Theory*

Bronfenbrenner (1977) employed a holistic concept that began with a corrective action, referred to as *Adolescent Ecological Theory of Development*, to explore why some students were chronically disengaged from school. Because a child does not develop in isolation, the child development concept provided a theoretical framework to ground research conclusions and findings relative to the development of children and their behavior. The child development theory shifted the focus from the study of an individual child’s deviant behavior to studying the student’s actions within the context of his or her environment (Slee & Shute, 2003). Bronfenbrenner (1977) explained that to understand the developmental process of adolescents, their relationships with families, schools, and peers are important in the analysis.

Bronfenbrenner (1977) explained the *ecological model* of child development, which provided a strong theoretical perspective of understanding why students may display tendencies toward truancy from high school. Each system described a child’s level of interaction with broad social groups. Bronfenbrenner (1977) shared that the
interactions with these groups could range from direct interactions with social agents, such as parents, to broad-based influences from culture. The many interactions between variables may occur simultaneously within the five environments [(a) microsystem, (b) mesosystems, (c) exosystem, (d) macrosystem, and (e) chronosystem] that may exert influence on adolescent behaviors. The *Ecological Theory of Adolescent Development* encourages a multiple risk factors analysis of the causes of chronic absenteeism and truancy. For the purpose of this research, risk factors were identified and examined individually with the understanding that negative practices and acts by students, may be the outcome of influences from more than one system. According to Baker et al. (2001), the comprehensive approach advocated in Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) theory provided a framework to accommodate such an approach. In practice, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency (OJJD) provided monetary and research support to agencies using a comprehensive model involving several disciplines, including psychology, social work, sociology, educational research, and criminology to lower the rates of student chronic absenteeism/truancy (Baker et al., 2001).

Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological theory of adolescent development was comprised of five environmental systems: (a) microsystem, (b) mesosystems, (c) exosystem, (d) macrosystem, and (f) chronosystem. Each system represented an influence on the development of a child (Slee & Shute, 2003). Multiple interactions between the child and institutions define each environmental system. Figure 1 shows a graphic representation of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Theory illustrating the relationships established in the theory. The following list describes each stage of child development theory:
1. The *microsystem* describes the child’s relationships with primary and early various settings, such as family, pre-school, neighborhoods, or peers.

2. The *mesosystem* describes relationships between the child and broad institutions such as school and church.

3. The *exosystem* describes relationships beyond the child’s control, influence, or social setting, such as the media, or pop-culture institutions that set the parameters for development.

*Figure 1. Depiction of Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory*  
Adapted from Ecological System Theory (Paquette & Ryan 2001). A graphic interpretation of the relationship between a child’s environment and its impact on a child’s development.
4. The *macrosystem* describes relationships with the child’s broader cultural environment, which includes mores, values, sub cultural environments, and the child’s ethnic or racial classification.

5. The *chronosystem* describes relationships to history and its role in influencing the development of adolescents (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). A framework to study student chronic absenteeism and or truancy, disengagement, and reengagement relies on understanding the child’s social, cultural, and economic context. Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) ecological theory provided a basis to study student disengagement, chronic absenteeism, and reengagement.

**Microsystem Environment Context–Risk Factors**

According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), during the *microsystem* development stage a child will begin to develop relationships with family, peers, the neighborhood, and school. Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) research attempted to understand how and to what quality children develop these relationships. Some relations may be positive, while some could be negative, putting the child at-risk. Risk factors may be an outcome of a child’s interactions with variables encountered while building relationships during this developmental stage.

Common risk factors identified by many researchers include compulsory education and related issues, student choice, socioeconomic status of the family, educational structural conditions, and student to teacher behavioral factors (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Corville-Smith et al., 1998; DeSocio et al., 2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2008; Wimmer, 2008). These factors were examined in the context of Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) theories of child development. The child’s experiences were
the foundation by which he or she develops. Additionally, if these experiences are not sufficient in number and quality, this may lead to arrested development when compared to the expected development for behavior of adolescents. The unmet child needs, according to Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) theories, may become the genesis for the development of adolescent risk factors that may lead to unacceptable behaviors, such as chronically absent from school or becoming a permanent or temporary dropout.

Student decision-making ability. The onset of early adolescent decision making in multiple areas of their lives is associated with greater conflict in their lives (Peterson, Bush, & Supple, 1999). A healthy parent-child relationship may foster adolescents to engage in decision making without engaging in problem behaviors, while a conflicted parent-child relationship may allow adolescents to engage in decision making that can lead to problem behaviors (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Peterson et al. (1999) reported that parent-child relationships, defined by connectedness, predicted the development of healthy decision-making behaviors. This suggested that the parent-child relationship plays a role in the development of decision-making behaviors that can lead to both positive and negative outcomes, depending on the connectedness established between the parent and the child.

Peer groups. Teenagers sort themselves into peer groups that vary in their attitudes toward intellectual achievement and school association (Harris, 2009). Peer interactions were reported to be the most powerful influence on students when they are making a decision (Harris, 2009; Hartnett, 2007; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Looker & Thiessen, 2008). According to Slee and Shute (2003), Bronfenbrenner (1977) expressed this contention. Within a school structure and environment, some peer groups are more
acceptable than others. Peers and peer groups (Hartnett, 2007; Henry & Huizinga, 2007) can influence a student’s attendance pattern of chronic absenteeism. Harris (2009) reported that peer groups are more powerful than parents in shaping a student’s individual and group values. Research by Henry and Huizinga (2007) supported this position. In their study, they reached the conclusion that delinquent peer association predicted 21% of the variance of truancy. In a Canadian study, peers were determined to have the greatest influence on adolescent’s negative or positive decisions than any other group (Terry, 2003). Terry (2003) reported that the relational dynamics of students were different for a negative decision and a positive decision. For example, peers holding positive attitudes toward school can influence students to re-enroll in school. On the other hand, Terry (2003) found that a negative decision of an adolescent usually followed an act of negative behavior demonstrated by a peer.

*Neighborhood influences.* The *contagion model* explained student negative behavior associated with their neighborhood environment that can be associated with high rates of chronic absenteeism (Kumar, O’Malley, & Johnston, 2008; Mayer & Jencks, 1990). The *contagion model* stipulated that the dominant behaviors found in a neighborhood are often transferred to the residents in the neighborhood, including the children (Mayer & Jencks, 1990). Kumar et al. (2008) suggested a negative behavior, such as truancy, has a positive relationship with a negative physical environment. In other words, in a neighborhood where walls are covered with graffiti, fixtures are broken, and lights are missing bulbs, students living in these environments tend to become involved in negative behaviors such as not attending schools regularly. However, on the other hand, some researchers found that the neighborhood environment was not the
dominant influence in the development of the residents (Elliott et al., 2006; Henry & Huizinga, 2007). Elliott et al. (2006) found that the quality of parenting or the quality of the school climate despite the neighborhood has a stronger impact on an adolescent’s development.

**Mesosystem Context–School Experiences**

*School culture.* Another physical environment of explaining and contributing to student chronic absenteeism and truancy lies within the school’s organizational structure and the school’s culture (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Because interactions between students and schools are prominent within the mesosystems and exosystems, these interactions have the greatest influence on the lives of adolescent students (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The organizational structure and the school culture contribute to students’ experiences, thus framing their perceptions of the school system (Akey, 2006; Hartnett, 2007). Students state they are frequently truant from school because of poor relationships with teachers, not feeling challenged, and lack of support to help them succeed (Railsback, 2004).

Students consistently supported by teachers show a strong attachment to school with improved social behaviors, such as improved school attendance (Hallinan, 2008). Students react against being left out by rejecting the values of the school (Eckert, 1989), which may lead to chronic absenteeism. A study conducted by Akey (2006) on student attitudes toward school engagement and academic achievement between 2001 and 2004, concluded that students who believe the rules of conduct in their school were clear and fairly administered were more likely to feel engaged and academically successful during the next year. Enomoto (1994) also suggested that conflicting visions of school identity
and inconsistent application of attendance policies, when noticed by the students, resulted in certain groups of students becoming disengaged from their school. If the experiences transmitted by schools are negative, student absenteeism and truancy tend to increase (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). However, when students felt the system was working for them and on their behalf, they are more likely to stay connected to teachers, the curriculum, and the school and remain in school (Hartnett, 2007).

**Academic Performance.** Many students who slowly disengaged from school were academically weak or they were several grades behind their peers (Almeidi et al., 2006; Baker et al., 2001; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Entwisle et al., 2004). According to Hauser and Koenig (2010), chronic absenteeism or truancy was important to observe and analyze because, along with poor attendance patterns, academic performance was usually low, and other risk factors present in a child’s life were strong indicators that magnified the likelihood that a student may drop out of school (Entwisle et al., 2004). Poor academic performance on assignments and tests, grade retention, and repeated transfers between schools were also indicators and possible risk factors for students dropping out of school. Barge (2011) reported that regardless of the number of absences taken by a student, the academic performance for that student was negatively impacted with each absence, with disengagement from school increasing with each absence.

**Other factors.** Hauser and Koening (2010) reported that potential student dropouts can be identified as early as the sixth grade, and students who fail English or mathematics are at a higher risk of not completing high school. Another indicator that a student may drop out of school was age related. A student repeating a class will be older than other students in the grade (Hauser & Koening, 2010). The status of being the oldest under
these circumstances added to a student’s alienation and disengagement from school. Hauser and Koening (2010) concluded that the earlier risk indicators appeared in a student’s academic history, the more likely the student would become a dropout. An engaged and academically successful student was unlikely to leave school prior to completion (Hauser & Koening, 2010).

School Refusal Behavior as a Risk Factor

School refusal behavior (SRB) theory is another explanation for chronic absenteeism (Wimmer, 2008). Wimmer (2008) defined SRB as the combination of all attempts to miss school resulting from a complex mix of emotional and social factors. Factors may include mental health problems, medical problems, family issues, and similar non-academic issues. According to Wimmer (2008), SRB has several traits that distinguish itself from traditional truancy. The typical truant student was absent without his or her parent’s permission but continued to be a functioning member of the student body, whereas the SRB student became totally disengaged from the school setting. Students falling under Wimmer’s (2008) SRB can be described as being chronically absent from school. Kearney (2001) stated that approximately 28% of truant related attendance was a result of SRB.

Exosystem Context—Self Choice

Students choose not to attend school for a variety of reasons. Bronfenbrenner (1977) claimed that the decision not to go to school is often based on a stimulus beyond the student’s control. Toby (1999) found that a majority of students became disengaged because they felt that schools were not meeting their needs or they were incapable of learning what was expected of them. Corville-Smith et al. (1998) agreed and noted that
student dissatisfaction with the school was the most prominent reason given by students for their absenteeism. According to Toby (1999), these students can be classified as internal dropouts. At this stage, students demonstrate a lack of maturity in making personal decisions that are in their best interests, yet their decision not to attend was probably influenced by personal experiences, peer pressure, or family influences (Bowers, 2010; Kearney, 2008). Cohen and Smerdon (2009) reported that students reject school because of poor academic performance and emotional or behavioral disabilities. Most students who drop out of school are from low-income families and, often, are minority students (Kronholz, 2011; Monrad, 2007). Structural environments of school systems and neighborhoods were found to also have some effect on the student’s decision to be absent from school.

Dube and Orpinas (2009) separated the rationales for chronic absenteeism as either child motivated or non-child motivated. The ecological model theorized that student absenteeism was highly related to students’ active involvement in their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Hattie (2010) found that student involvement in extracurricular activities had a positive impact on students remaining in school through completion. Student academic performance increased with the participation in each extracurricular activity up to a certain point, usually a maximum of three. Child motivated behaviors are related to their personal choices and external forces such as neighborhood and school conditions that caused non-child motivations (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).

The aforementioned areas described a level of dissatisfaction with school, and, according to Entwisle et al. (2004), students dissatisfied with school displayed irregular
patterns of attendance that could lead to extended periods of sporadic attendance over several years. Yet Teasley (2004) described the process of truancy as stemming from a student’s disinterest in school, class avoidance, and a failure to keep up academically. Other external reasons beyond the student and family control may be illness, weather, or transportation (Malbon & Nuttal, 1982). Some explanations should be viewed narrowly because many may be the result of the student’s family or socioeconomic structure, thereby supporting the need to examine the problem comprehensively.

*Characteristics of Returning Students.*

Researchers, such as Looker and Thieseen (2008) and Entwisle et al. (2004), have identified several characteristics associated with students who return to school after temporarily leaving. Looker and Thieseen (2008) stated that females are more likely to return to school than males. They also found that many of the students returning to school were from families with high socioeconomic status. These students also had a history of higher academic performance than permanent dropouts. The Bernardino study (Berliner et al., 2008) indicated that over 50% of re-enrollees drop out during their freshman year. This group is not very successful; over 40% of returning students will drop out again. Berliner et al. (2008) also found that Black dropouts, female dropouts, and non-English speaking students comprised the largest groups of re-enrollees in the San Bernardino School District.

Students who return to school after dropping out demonstrated that dropping out did not have to be a permanent condition, but a temporary interruption toward graduation. They are often described as *resilient*. Looker and Thiessen (2008) recognized that a range of risk factors influenced students’ decisions to return to school. However, they
shared that the research on why students return was not as substantial as the research on why students drop out (Platt & Farber, 2002). Available studies focused on student resiliency and students’ desire to improve their economic situation as reasons for returning to school after dropping out.

Student Educational Resiliency

Student resilience offers a theoretical framework to examine why students find the strength and motivation to return to school. Resilience offers a counter balance to negative factors students face as described by Bronfenbrenner (1977) in his ecology of human development. Researchers have identified the ability to overcome obstacles of risk as resilience. According to Reis et al. (2005), a single definition for resilience has lacked development and broad acceptance, but is seen as a protective factor that promotes positive outcomes by students. Resilience has been defined as being hardy, invulnerable, and invincible (Wolin & Wolin, 1993); as a protective mechanism that modifies an individual’s response to a risk (Rutter, 1987); and individual’s response to stress and adversity (Waxman, 1992). Each definition contained the element of risk or adversity, which many of the identified causes of chronic absenteeism/truancy may be labeled. Resiliency is not concrete or very tangible and is subject to change over time (Reis et al., 2005).

Winfield (1994) defined resiliency differently. He stated that resiliency is an interaction between the characteristics of the individual and the environment. However, Crosnoe and Elder (2004) concluded that at risk (i.e., chronically absent) students who demonstrated resilience had a strong sense of self-efficacy and believed they were successful because they chose to be. In addition, a psychological support system in and
out of school provides support and encouragement to the student. Educational resilience may be promoted through emotionally supported relationships with friends, teachers, family, and siblings (Crosnoe & Elder, 2004). Family ties can encourage students to continue in an educational environment by providing support (Winfield, 1994). Parent participation in the student’s educational process with such activities as homework monitoring, test grades monitoring, and involvement in school organizations can reduce the probability of truancy (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). According to Crosnoe and Elder (2004), family members, peers, and teachers can be a balance against negative related school behavior of adolescents. However, Crosnoe and Elder (2004) were concerned about the lack of research in this area and suggested that additional research is needed to understand fully the family relationship to student educational resiliency.

**Macrosystem Context–Cultural Expectations**

Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) *macrosystem* addressed how a child responds to the broader cultural environment, which includes mores, values, sub-cultural environments, and ethnic or racial classifications. The National Center for Education Statistics (2008) charted the influence of ethnicity with the comparison of non-Asian minority students to Asian students. Students’ socioeconomic status, family income, family structure, familial expectations, and value placed on education were elements used to analyze a child’s developmental progress. The research suggested the profiles of students who are chronically absent or truant three or more days were minority students of non-Asian descent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008).

Familial constraints have been associated with chronically absent/truant students. DeSocio et al. (2007), Epstein and Sheldon (2002), and Hocking (2008) reported that
truancy was a symptom of family needs requiring the student to be away from school, such as providing childcare or producing income for the family. These students were most likely found to be members of families from the lower socioeconomic brackets of society. According to Chang and Romero (2008), when families are struggling with a lack of transportation, poorly paying jobs, inflexible work hours, housing instability, inadequate health care, and escalating violence, the student’s attendance suffered. Poor discipline, over-protectiveness, ineffective family structure, poor social environments, poor physiological well being, and an adverse environment were also traits found in chronically absent students (Lan & Lanthier, 2003).

Gender

Gender plays a role in which students will drop out of school and why. Yeide and Kobrin (2009) reported that male students drop out at an earlier age than females do and for different reasons. They found that males usually leave school to enter the workforce, while females leave because they become mothers. Disagreement existed between Yeide and Kobrin (2009) and Henry and Huizinga (2007) concerning which gender comprised the largest percentage of the truancy or chronic absenteeism populations. Yeide and Kobrin (2009) discovered there was no statistically significant difference between male and female rates of absenteeism. While, Henry and Huizinga (2007) reported that girls skipped school more often than boys. The mixed data clearly warrants additional exploration to determine if there is a true difference between male and female chronic absenteeism. A resolution in the discrepancy is important to provide those working to improve the chronic absenteeism with a firmer foundation to formulate prevention and intervention programming.
Chronosystem Context – Historical Development of Compulsory Attendance Laws

The Chronosystem cycle of Bronfenbrenner's (1977) child development theory attempted to explain how a child's development is influenced by historical events. The evolution of compulsory education and attendance has made a dramatic impact on student attendance (Williams, 2008). Compulsory attendance mandates that a child must attend school between certain ages, and compulsory education laws dictate the curriculum of a student (Williams, 2008). The introduction of compulsory attendance by states established the legal requirement that students must attend school and that local boards of education are responsible to ensure their attendance.

Compulsory education. Compulsory education has been an essential tool used by states in addressing their constitutional requirement to provide a free and adequate education to all (Katz, 1976). However, since the inception of compulsory education, there have been those who have rebelled against the requirement of involuntarily attending school (Katz, 1976). Students have a long history of skipping school for extended periods or eventually leaving school entirely in violation of compulsory education laws (Provasnik, 2006), while other students have histories of leaving temporarily yet eventually returning to complete their studies (Looker & Thiessen, 2008).

The concept of ruling bodies regulating education and mandating parental and community compliance to mandatory school attendance has deep historical roots. Historically, religious leaders understood that in order to ensure the continuity and continuance of their religion, a literate population was necessary (Levy, 2008). Early Jewish religious documents referenced compulsory education. Levy (2008) attributed the start of compulsory education with the codification of Jewish law in the Talmud (Levine,
In addition, the 16th-century Reformation movement led by Martin Luther linked the concept of compulsory attendance as a religious requirement (Gorden, 1975).

*Compulsory attendance.* Because of various historic needs of educators, the community, the state, legislators, parents, and industry compulsory attendance has historically been part of the American school tradition (Provasnik, 2006). As the result of the educational reform movement and other social factors, states began to enact similar laws. Horace Mann, the first Superintendent of Education in Massachusetts, and other reformers such as Henry Barnard campaigned for the enactment of compulsory school attendance laws. They believed that requiring children to attend free common schools would achieve the following: christian morality would unite with democracy; ignorance, vice, crime, and aristocratic privilege would be eliminated; new immigrants would be assimilated. Their campaign led to the passage of the Compulsory Education Law in 1852 and subsequent refinement of the law (Katz, 1976). Mann and other reformers believed that common education compelled by compulsory attendance laws could equalize society (Katz, 1976).

Legal decisions rendered by both state and federal court rulings and changing educational focus by the states have caused states’ regulatory authority to evolve into two very distinct purposes (Provasnik, 2006). States passed compulsory education laws to fulfill the education mandate granted in the United States Constitution. Historically, compulsory education laws predate compulsory attendance laws by over 200 years. Massachusetts, following its tradition of being an educational leader, passed the first compulsory school attendance law in 1852, *(Massachusetts General Court, 1852)*, requiring students to attend school between the ages of 8 and 14 (Christie, 2007;
Provasnik, 2006). States such as Massachusetts, originally passed compulsory education laws and then progressed to compulsory attendance laws (Katz, 1976; Provasnik, 2006; Russo, 2006). The Bay Colony of Massachusetts and the state of Massachusetts, respectively, enacted both types of laws (Katz, 1976). The last state to adopt compulsory attendance laws was Alaska in 1929. According to Provasnik (2006), the terms *compulsory attendance* and *compulsory education* are often confused and used interchangeably by both educators and the public. The intention of the laws was to serve the best interest of society by requiring school attendance for all students (Provasnik, 2006).

**Loco parentis.** Russo (2006) explained compulsory attendance law was grounded in and based on two common law assumptions: the concept of *loco parentis* (in the place of the parent), which comes from the common law assumption that parents voluntarily submit their children to school authority, and *parens patriae* (*father of the country*). The assumption was that state legislatures should have the authority to enact reasonable laws for the welfare of the state (Russo, 2006). States also justified the enforcement of compulsory attendance of students using the states’ police power (Provasnik, 2006). Although a common and acceptable fact within the educational community, reaching this level of acceptance was a tenuous and hard fought political battle (Provasnik, 2006). For example, Mississippi was the last state to enact compulsory attendance laws, and it was the first state to repeal its compulsory attendance laws (Katz, 1976). Katz (1976) calculated that it took 66 years for all states to enact compulsory attendance laws.

Citizens in several states contested the constitutionality of compulsory laws as un-American and were successful at the lower court level, only to have the decisions
overturned by their states’ supreme courts, giving states full control over educational issues (Provasnik, 2006). Federal Supreme Court rulings stemming from *Meyer v. Nebraska* in 1923 and *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* in 1925 placed restrictions on states’ power to enact compulsory education laws, but did not address the states’ authority to enact compulsory attendance laws (Russo, 2006). Russo (2006) reported a truant act was a result of students violating compulsory attendance laws enacted by all states through their federal partnership for providing educational opportunities. The 10th Amendment of United States Constitution reserved educational authority to the states (U.S. Const. amend. X). Curbing the states’ ability to enforce compulsory attendance laws did not occur until challenged in *Wisconsin v. Yoder* in 1972 (Russo, 2006). In *Yoder*, the Supreme Court supported the stand of an Amish family to remove their child from the high school because they felt an eighth-grade education was adequate within their society (Russo, 2006). The Supreme Court reinforced parental rights in the decision of *Troxel v. Granville* that ruled children could not be removed from parents unless parental control falters (Bradshaw, 2008). Although *Troxel v. Granville* protected some parental rights, relative to school attendance the Court continued to allow states to determine the age for initial enrollment and final withdrawal from school (U.S. Const. amend. X).

A major issue that made it difficult to understand the pattern of attendance associated with the chronic absenteeism was the variation of compulsory attendance laws adopted by states and school districts. The beginning age of students starting school in the United States and its territories ranges from age of five to eight years of age, as illustrated in Appendix A (Infoplease.com). The inconsistent approach by states setting the legal age of non-compliance for compulsory education complicates researchers’
ability to collect and compare attendance data between the states (de Jung & Duckworth, 1985). Historically, record keeping has provided an incomplete accounting of how many students were in violation of compulsory education laws. One reason it was difficult for educators to realize the magnitude of the problem was the lack of comparable data between states (Christie, 2006; Enea & Dafinoiu, 2009).

Types of Absences. According to Williams (2008) districts track student absences by maintaining a daily record of student attendance. Absences traditionally are either coded as excused or un-excused by school districts. Allowable absences as determined by school officials with parental consent are classified as excused. These absences can cover medical appointments, religious holidays, and other such situations. However, students away from school without parental permission or not meeting one of the allowable reasons to be out of school by the state are usually considered truant and un-excused (Williams, 2008).

De Jung and Duckworth (1985) explained that truant and unexcused absences subject student and parents to penalties by the state, especially if the student is away from school for an entire day. Another dimension of understanding the full ramification of the student attendance problem is the granting of partial day absences by some schools. Districts and states have experienced record keeping problem with student absences that are less than a day. de Jung and Duckworth (1985) contended that partial day absences could have the same negative impact and outcome on students as those who were out for a full day. Kearney (2008) found that students who miss partial days by skipping one or more classes, arriving tardy to school, and missing school without detection, are typically not included in the tally of daily absences. Christie (2006) reported that several states
have discussed the impact of partial day absences and have used partial measures to define truancy. New Hampshire is such a state where a student missing 20 half-days of unexcused absences during a year is considered habitually truant (Christie, 2006). Both studies indicated that the research on the impact of partial absences and its relationship to chronic absenteeism is inadequate (Christie, 2006; Kearney, 2008).

Record Keeping. A second major area of concern in understanding the scope of chronic absenteeism and truancy is record keeping. Since the inception and maintenance of attendance records by both urban and rural school systems, schools have faced the problem of defining, collecting, and managing student attendance data (DeSocio et al., 2007; Enea & Dafinoiu, 2009; Heilbrunn, 2007). Current and past literature illustrated that record keeping is not accurate and, at times, not consistently recorded by school personnel. Meyer, Chase-Dunn, and Inverarity (1971) suspected that absences have probably been underreported for at least 40 years because of administrative concern for the appearance that there may be a problem in their schools, school reimbursements, student deviousness, careless reporting practices, and varying definitions of absences.

Time has not resolved this issue for schools. DeSocio et al. (2007), Enea and Dafinoiu (2009), and Heilbrunn (2007) have documented that schools continue to face problems in the areas of recording truancy data consistently and adequately. For example, in Arizona, students were considered to be truant if they skipped at least one class period without approval and considered habitually truant if they missed five days during the school year (Christie, 2006). Meanwhile in California, students were deemed truant after missing three days. In Colorado, when students accumulate four unexcused absences during a month or 10 unexcused absences during a year, this constituted truant behavior
Students were labeled as habitually truant if they accumulated four unexcused absences in one month or 10 unexcused absences during the year (Christie, 2006).

Many factors hindered the effectiveness of the laws. According to Katz (1976), many of the laws were not enforceable, especially in the rural areas and states. The U.S. Commissioner of Education said in 1886 that, “In many instances…the compulsory education law, if not actually dead letter, is practically so” (Katz, 1976, p. 20).

Compulsory attendance laws were not effective in increasing school attendance until the following conditions of industrial change, rapid technological changes, influx of immigrants into the United States, and rapid urbanization coincided. The need for a skilled work force during the early 1900s accelerated the country’s movement toward the enactment of compulsory attendance statutes (Katz, 1976). The compulsory attendance statutes varied greatly across state lines in their specifications and enforceability (Lleras-Muney, 2001). Provasnik (2006) added that increased passage of compulsory attendance laws during the 1920s were a reaction to postwar World War I, and the Russian Revolution was an attempt to Americanize the new immigrants populating Russian and German communities.

Initially, many of the compulsory attendance laws were not enforceable, nor were they effective (Katz, 1976). However, over time, compulsory attendance laws increased school enrollment and provided economic opportunities with the exception of the southern states and amongst African-American students (Lleras-Muney, 2001). Lleras-Muney (2001) contended that compulsory attendance laws when coupled with child labor laws were very effective in increasing student attendance in most geographic regions and
across most ethnic groups. Lleras-Muney (2001) provided an analysis showing that laws requiring a child to attend school for one more year increased educational attainment by about 18 days and decreased educational inequality. Because of the perceived benefits, compulsory attendance laws were widely supported by a wide spectrum of the country’s population (Katz, 1976). A 1975 Gallup poll reported that 90% of the population favors compulsory school attendance laws (Katz, 1976). A more recent Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll 2001 (Cave, n.d.) concurred that the American public continued to favor the current school system over alternatives.

The lack of improvement in graduation rates and the importance of high school graduation prior to either entering the workforce or into postsecondary institutions during the past three decades have prompted the states to either pass or propose legislation to increase the compulsory attendance age (Kaufmann, Alt, & Chapman, 2001). Between 1984 and 2006, 14 states passed enhanced compulsory attendance laws increasing the number of years a student is obligated to stay in school (Christie, 2007). Since 2002, several states, such as New York, Connecticut, Louisiana, New York, Texas, New Hampshire, South Dakota, and Vermont, have recently considered changing their compulsory attendance laws (Bhanpuri & Reynolds, 2003; Bush, 2010). Successful states passing new compulsory attendance laws, such as Louisiana and Connecticut, included similar language and processes in their legislation. In 2001, Louisiana increased its compulsory attendance age from 17 to 18 (Bhanpuri & Reynolds, 2003). In 2005, Nebraska followed and increased its compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18; in 2006, Colorado increased its age limit to 17; New Jersey also enacted similar policies in
2008, and in 2007; Wyoming introduced legislation, although defeated, to increase the compulsory attendance age limit to 18 years of age (Christie, 2007).

States have begun to enact additional penalties while other states have enacted non-traditional penalties. One of the most recent non-traditional sanctions was the loss of driving privileges by students enacted by West Virginia and Georgia. In 1988, West Virginia enacted a version of this law with little effect on the dropout rate (Toby, 1999). In 2007 Georgia’s General Assembly approved a law that would keep teens who had dropped out of school or were chronically truant from being able to drive. The result of the legislation has resulted in thousands of license suspensions, but it has not been enacted long enough to realize its impact on the dropout rate (Salzer, 1999).

Pennsylvania, Kentucky, and North Carolina passed similar laws for revoking driving privileges for students younger than the mandatory attendance age based on school attendance. Other states such as Pennsylvania and Michigan were holding parents accountable for their students’ school attendance by allowing school districts to sue or fine parents of chronically absent students (Kurth, 2001).

In addition to the social and economic pressures, other sectors have also questioned the value of compulsory education (Bhanpuri & Reynolds, 2003). Compulsory attendance laws ignore three major negative forces associated with compulsory education: (a) many students do not understand what they are expected to learn, (b) uncommitted students lower teacher and student morale causing high levels of teacher turnover, and (c) students labeled as internal dropouts contribute to increased school discipline and violence. Bhanpuri and Reynolds (2003) suggested a truly voluntary system, such as the one that exists in Japan, where students graduate at a much
higher rate than those in the United States, would alleviate the problems associated with disengaged students. Toby (1999) found 40% of students were disengaged from the educational process during the length of their stays in high school.

Because of the negative impressions of public education and competition for students from charter schools, home schooling, and private schools were forcing school districts to adopt policies that would protect their viability to attract and keep students (Toby, 1999). Some states have taken a benevolent approach in attempts to mitigate patterns of chronic absenteeism and truancy. For example, students in Maine can get a waiver to leave early if they have parental permission in writing or have approval from a school principal and the local school board to participate in a suitable work-study program (Bhanpuri & Reynolds, 2003). In Connecticut, students who return to school after dropping out have access to resources to assist in the transitioning back into school. Louisiana has created a provision in its legislation that requires school districts to create individual plans of education to maximize the potential of at-risk students and create an atmosphere that is comfortable as well as learning intensive (Bhanpuri & Reynolds, 2003).

McGhan (1998) proposed that what the public really wanted was that public schools have the option to drop unruly students. McGhan (1998) used as a support to this trend New York State’s consideration of removing disruptive students and the American Federation of Teacher’s union support for a zero tolerance policy toward unruly students. McGhan (1998) saw these movements as a trend toward revoking compulsory education laws and allowing districts to establish dropping policies. Although McGhan (1998) believed a truly voluntary school system with appropriate policies, procedures, and
supporting programs would not solve the problem of dropping, a truly voluntary system of education would be best for students.

McGhan (1998) reached this conclusion based on an understanding of Amitai’s (1975) research of individual behavior within certain types of organizational structures. Amitai (1975) described schools as having normative or moral power over students. Participants in a normative organization follow rules because of a moral or voluntary attachment to the organization (Amitai, 1975). However, McGhan (1998) countered that normative organizations, such as schools, have less authority over participants and provide environments that are conducive and support rebellious activity such as truancy, misbehaving, and dropping out. Incorporated within each argument are benefits and negatives for consideration as educators continue their quest for appropriate and adequate educational structures.

*Federal influence on chronic absenteeism/truancy.* Enforcing and monitoring compulsory education has traditionally been the exclusive right of state governments granted by the United States Constitution. However, recent actions by the federal government showed that it is beginning to take a more aggressive and active role in public education. For example, The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) required states to report truancy rates by school beginning with the 2005–2006 school years. Bradshaw (2008) felt because federal funding awarded to local schools reflected attendance, schools may attempt to improve their attendance data by forcing poor and minority students out of the schools. Consequently, the pressures placed on schools by the (NCLB, 2002) legislation to improve attendance and test scores have caused schools
to adopt policies to remove problematic students from their home schools (Bradshaw, 2008).

*Georgia compulsory attendance law.* In 1916, under the leadership of Governor Nathaniel Harris, the State of Georgia established its first compulsory attendance law (Jackson & Pou, 2011). Students between the ages of 8 and 14 were required to attend school. Current Georgia law stipulates mandatory attendance for children between their sixth and 16th birthdays in a public school, a private school, or a home-schooled program. Violation of the Georgia code attendance law establishes penalties for students and parents. However, exemptions from truancy requirements exist for private and home-schooled students. Georgia does recognize there are days students must be absent from school and has codified what constitutes an excused or unexcused absent. Excused absences are defined by law and in the State Board of Education Rules 2011 (Georgia Department of Education, 2011). As applied in the *SCSD*, students may be temporarily excused from school for the following reasons:

1. When personally ill and when attendance in school would endanger their health or the health of others;

2. When in their immediate family there is a serious illness or death, which would reasonably necessitate absence from school;

3. On special and recognized religious holidays observed by their faith;

4. When mandated by order of governmental agencies (i.e., pre-induction physical examination for service in the armed forces or a court order);

5. When prevented from such attendance due to conditions rendering school attendance impossible or hazardous to their health or safety;
6. Children who are at least 12 years of age and who are serving as pages of the Georgia General Assembly shall be credited as present by the school in which they are enrolled for days missed from school for this purpose;

7. A student may be granted an excused absence not to exceed one day in order to register to vote or to vote in a public election; and

8. A student whose parent/guardian is in military service in the Armed Forces of the United States or the National Guard, and such parent/guardian has been called to duty for or is on leave from overseas deployment to a combat zone or combat support posting, shall be granted excused absences, up to a maximum of five (5) school days per school year, for the day or days missed from school to visit with his/her parent/guardian prior to such parent/guardian’s deployment or during such parent/guardian’s leave (SCSD, 2012b).

Allowable unexcused student absences were limited and those students exceeding the allowable unexcused absences were subjected to penalties and deemed truant. Georgia defined *truant* as any child subject to compulsory attendance who during the school calendar year has more than five days of unexcused absences. A truancy response protocol is established for local school boards to address student truancy. In addition, the state authorizes local school districts to formulate additional penalties and protocols. The local school district determined and set protocol for referring students to the judicial system. Each truant offense was treated as a separate offense. Truancy violations were misdemeanors with a possible fine of up to $100 and/or prison up to 30 days. Students could also lose their driving privileges (Georgia Department of Education, 2011).
Consequences for Temporarily Dropping Out of School (Chronic Absenteeism)

The practice of temporarily dropping out of school has both short-term and long-term impact on students, the school, and the community. The immediate impact of chronic absenteeism was a lowering of academic performance (McGiboney, 2011; Teasley, 2004). For example, McGiboney (2011) conjectured that chronically being absent from school adversely affected the academic success of Georgia students. Impaired behavior, social skills, isolation from peers and the school community are long-term implications (Teasley, 2004). Additional, long-term implications for the are isolation from the family and society, poor job readiness, poor social adaptability, lowered earning potential and possible involvement in illegal activities (Teasley, 2004). High absenteeism affects student achievement, personal self-esteem, the financial health of schools, school functioning, and the community (Teasley, 2004).

Poor academic performance. Student attendance has a tremendous impact on student achievement (National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), 2001). Better understanding of the problem could provide an equitable and quality education to those who feel most alienated from the school system. Academic performance and potential productively as an adult are adversely affected when students do not attend school or complete their schooling (Gottfried, 2011). Gottfried (2011) found evidence to support previous studies that concluded that a connection exists between academic success and positive attendance patterns. Lost earnings, increased social costs, the possibility of criminal activity, increased medical costs, and the potential instability of the family are all associated with students who do not attend school on a regular basis (Entwisle et al., 2004 Gottfried, 2011; NAESP, 2001).
School finances. Chronic student absenteeism has a long-term effect on public finances as revenues by severely reduced when students are absent (Baker et al., 2001; Heilbrunn, 2007). Chronic absenteeism directly affects local school districts’ budgets negatively. Student daily attendance influences school funding. Full-time-equivalency formulas or average daily attendance rates are the primary basis for funding from state boards of education and federal agencies. For example, in 1998 because of high chronic absenteeism, Oakland’s schools in California, lost more than $4,000,000 dollars in funding (“PhoneMaster systems reduce truancy,” 1998). A theoretical example formulated by Phillips (2010) calculated that the national truancy rate of 6% would cost a high school $21,000 a year. Improved attendance will increase revenue to a school district. As chronic truancy, rates improve, funding increases. North Richmond, California, provides an example and saw an increase in funding by $470,000 when they increased their attendance rate by 4% (Chang & Romero, 2008). The amount of federal financial aid awarded a state is based on the state’s truancy rates (Heilbrunn, 2007), resulting in a need for school systems to recognize and understand the factors influencing high absenteeism rates and to take constructive action for improvement in order to protect their revenue streams.

Social cost. According to Birman and Natriello (1978), adolescents chronically absent from school and unemployed are involved in delinquent acts and crime. Truancy can add to the crime rate associated with a city. For example, according to DeKalb (1999), crime dropped 60% after the Van Nuys’ police department conducted systematic truancy sweeps in the city. Increased crime rates are only a portion of the social costs. Heilbrunn (2007) estimated that each individual who does not complete high school costs
a lifetime average of $200,000 in public monies over and above similar costs for high school graduates. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2001) reported in 1999, 6% of workers with high school diplomas were in poverty compared with 14.3% of workers who did not receive a high school diploma. Reports from the U.S. Department of Labor (2011) indicated small change in this statistic in 2011. However, the U.S. Department of Labor (2011) reported that the current jobless rate for recent high school dropouts was 42.7%, compared with 33.4% for recent high school graduates not enrolled in college.

Baker et al. (2001) reported that adults who were chronically absent in high school are more likely to experience the following social conditions: (a) exhibit poor physical and mental health, (b) work in low paying jobs, (c) live in poverty, (d) use the welfare system more, (e) have children with problem behaviors, and (f) are incarcerated more often than adults who routinely attended school. In addition, chronic absenteeism leads to excess public costs, lost tax revenues, increased social services costs, and increased rates of incarceration (Heilbrunn, 2007). Based on the studies completed by Baker et al. (2001); Heilbrunn (2007); McGiboney (2011); and Teasley (2004), the social and monetary cost to the individual, the school, the community, the state, and the nation is tremendous. Research by Williams (2008) indicated that Georgia did not always collect statewide truancy statistics because there was no legal definition for truancy in the state’s code until 2007. During the 2007 legislative session, the state placed an emphasis on truant behavior. Collection of truancy data is a function of the local school districts, but State law requires school districts to send the data to the department of education. As Williams (2008) stated, local school boards have discretion to determine what truancy measures are adopted. The lack of a uniformed statewide statistic makes it difficult to
measure truancy levels and its consequences in Georgia. It is difficult to compare	ruancy rates between Georgia’s districts as well as between states (de Jung &
Duckworth, 1985; Meyer et al., 1971) and to make meaningful and comprehensive
recommendations for corrective action. The lack of data on the students who return
voluntarily to school to become completers adds to the difficulty of conducting a
thorough analysis of the problem locally and nationally.

Second Chance Interventions

Effective interventions should be systematic and continuous when applied to the
problem or irregular school attendance patterns Henry and Huizinga (2007).
Unfortunately, this was not the standard; haphazard application may do more damage
than good. Henry and Huizinga (2007) reported that only 6% of high school students
who were chronically absent will receive more than a phone call or letter as an
intervention. Current research indicates that collaboration of resources is essential for the
development of workable and practical solutions to curb chronic absenteeism, truancy
and dropping out.

Research by Hauser and Koenig (2010) indicated that intervention programming
must be multi-level and multi-dimensional in order to address the increased
accountability requirements placed on schools and educators by local, state, and federal
agencies. The political and social climate has forced schools to develop and implement
adequate programs to curb chronic student absenteeism or truancy and to address the
concerns of re-enrollees. However, there is a more salient reason why well-designed
intervention and support programs are necessary. Henry and Huizinga (2007) reported
that schools may intervene in the episodic chronic absenteeism and truancy and make an impact.

Intervention and support programs assist students in the learning process because underachievement is periodic and episodic leading to attendance problems for the student (Reis, 1998). Underachievement was documented as a risk factor for chronic absenteeism/truancy (Bridgeland et al., 2006; Chang & Romero, 2008; Entwisle et al., 2004; Looker & Thiessen, 2008); therefore, a conclusion may be reached that chronic absenteeism/truancy too is periodic and episodic. Students will need assistance to make the most of the positive times, and have the ability and support should they make the decision to return to school.

School districts have applied a variety of approaches as an attempt to reduce student absenteeism/truancy. The strategies ranged from reprimanding the student administratively with either in or out of school suspensions. Other options involved the judicial system, behavioral interventions, and instructional and/or structural changes in the educational environment. Other strategies addressed how to improve student resiliency. Researchers such as de Junge and Duckworth (1985) and Gabb (1995) classified corrective approaches into two categories. One strategy is concerned with removing or correcting implements directly related to delivery of instructional services. The second strategy incorporates behavioral modification techniques and practices to improve attendance. Gabb (1995) named corrective strategies as either empirical or social engineering. He used the term empirical relative to the medical practices of applying suspected cures to an ailment then seeking why the cure worked. The author does not feel that an empirical approach, which he describes as the scientific approach, is
effective in correcting what he considers chronic absenteeism/truancy as a social science problem. He feels treating chronic absenteeism in this manner is inappropriate because “the opportunities for tightly controlled experiments are effectively zero” (Gabb, 1995, p. 1).

Current researchers of truancy advocate a systematic and comprehensive approach to addressing chronic absenteeism. Effective treatment of chronic absenteeism is best achieved through altering the social forces or factors that lead students to be ill equipped to function in a school setting. Both studies articulated the need for a multi-discipline approach to curtailing chronic student absenteeism. Corville-Smith et al. (1998) supported the contention that chronic absenteeism was not a result of one risk factor but of several, requiring a multi-prong approach to intervention. Intuitively, a multi-prong approach and early intervention would be obvious to those working with school related issues.

The National Center for School Engagement (2006) reported that many students are not offered opportunities for intervention treatments. Only 4% of elementary students, 16% of middle school students, and 6% of high school students received any form of intervention from authorities other than a phone call. To see improvement in lowering chronically absenteeism, truancy students must be identified prior to them beginning the cycle of skipping school (Henry & Huniziga, 2007). Temporary dropouts too must be identified early as Henry and Huniziga (2007) suggested for the chronically absent/truant and effective strategies will have to be developed and implemented before students curb the patterns of not attending school.
School based intervention strategies. Administrative actions taken by the school system are commonly the initial action taken to correct the problem (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2010). Historically, schools have addressed issues of chronic absenteeism by blaming individual students who are considered deviants (Hartnett, 2007). School officials once thought the solution to the absenteeism problem was to allow the attendance to affect student achievement using suspension, expulsion, or other administrative remedies (National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention, 2010). However, according to de Jung and Duckworth (1985), school penalties are only a minor deterrent to chronic absenteeism for many students. Teasley (2004) concluded that the adoption of zero tolerance policies alienated students rather than improved attendance.

Judicial interventions. The extreme option was to involve the juvenile court system to treat chronic absenteeism. According to the National Center for Mental Health Promotion and Youth Violence Prevention (2010), schools can take habitually chronic absent students to juvenile or family court where the parents may be fined or jailed. Court referrals relating to chronic absenteeism increased between 1985 and 1999. Boston experienced increases in truancy court cases (36,400) of 67% from 1985 to 1994 (Biele, Gatland, & McLaughlin, 1998). Nationally, the number of petitioned court truancy cases increased 92% from just over 20,000 in 1987 to almost 40,000 in 1996 (Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). Puzzanchera and Sickmund (2008), 28% of juvenile status offenses in 2005 were truancy cases compared to 35% in 2005.

Alternative schools. Other structural responses have been the creation and establishment of non-traditional schools. Emery (2000) reported non-traditional schools
may be referred to as open campus schools, alternative schools, or simply as non-traditional settings offering different curriculum or different methods of teaching. Research conducted by Emery (2000) provided an educational, historical, cultural, and political context to evaluate the development of alternative schools from the late 1890s to the present day. Alternative schools as an educational option saw a rebirth during the 1960s and 1970s to meet the needs of children and adolescents who could not learn effectively in a traditional school environment (Emery, 2000). Alternative schools according to what is prevalent in the data will structurally display some of the following characteristics: they are small (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990); believes that a supportive environment is important (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Lang, 1998); allows flexibility in organization and structure (Natriello et al., 1990). Other characteristics ascribed, but not stated in the above list are (a) an emphasis on individual instruction, (b) a focus on basic academic skills, and (c) social skills instruction (Lehr, 2004). Non-traditional schools, once available primarily for disruptive students and those at risk of dropping out of school, have evolved into a broader purpose as parents and the educational community sought other alternatives to traditional education (Lehr, 2004).

Alternative schools have served different purposes; they tend to share the desire to meet the needs of students who have not optimally benefited from traditional school programs (Lange, 1998). Typically, non-traditional schools have curricular elements focusing on improving student self-esteem, fostering individual growth, and enhancing social skills reflecting elements of student resilience theory. Raywid (1994) outlined three characteristics often found in alternatives schools: (a) they generate and sustain a community, (b) they make learning engaging, and (c) they provide the organization and
structure needed to sustain the previous two situations. In addition, the non-traditional school has an administration and structure that is more flexible than traditional schools.

Elements found in a non-traditional school setting are extensions of the resilience theory framework (Reis et al., 2005; Rutter, 1987; Wolin & Wolin, 1993). For example, a key component of non-traditional schools is opportunities for students to connect with a protective factor such as an adult (Reis et al., 2005). Reis et al. (2005) defined protective factor as variables that promote positive outcomes. However, studies focused on the role of non-traditional schools did not make the connection of their success with resiliency. This condition supports the contention made earlier that a collaborative approach is essential to effect improvements in reducing student chronic absenteeism/truancy.

*Collective behavioral interventions.* Hartnett (2007) offered a different approach toward corrective action. Past policies designed to change attendance patterns of teenage absenteeism relied on student accountability data (tracking absences and the nature of them), inclusion of marginalized peer groups, and quality relational teaching. Hartnett (2007) suggested that schools should make effective changes in the school’s culture, reporting that, “Change means getting down to the personal, relationship level and addressing the cultural beliefs and practices of teenagers” (p. 8). One way to achieve this change is by limiting the number of student/teacher interactions during the day by implementing block scheduling (Hartnett, 2007). With fewer teacher/student interactions, teachers have more energy for personalized, differentiated instruction (Hartnett, 2007). Scheduling changes such as block scheduling emphasize minimizing multiple student teacher contact which reduces student anxiety (Veal & Flinders, 2001), therefore affecting student attendance in a positive manner. Veal and Flinders (2001)
found that larger blocks of instructional time provides for longer exposure time to the curriculum. Researchers such as, Reis et al., (2005) stated that extended time in the school setting allows for the creation of positive interactions between staff and student, which may foster improved social skills and improve student achievement.

Review of the literature suggested that reduction programs can be effective in curbing chronic absenteeism. Railsback (2004) provided evidence that effective truancy reduction programs are comprehensive and respond to the four categories of risk factors shown to be relevant to truancy, family, school, economic, and student factors. Railsback (2004) found that effective strategies for increasing student attendance fell into four broad categories:

1. Sound and reasonable attendance policies with consequences for missing school;
2. Early interventions, especially with elementary students and their families;
3. Targeted interventions for students with chronic attendance problems; and
4. Strategies to increase engagement and personalization with students and families that can affect attendance rates: family involvement, culturally responsive culture, smaller learning community structures, mentoring, advisory programs, maximization, and focus on learning time, and service learning.

Akey (2006) supported the Railsback (2004) recommendations. Akey (2006) conducted a longitudinal study that covered a span of three years in an urban school district consisting of 449 students. He concluded that if student-teacher engagement is to be beneficial, the engagement must be consistent and have continuity. Akey (2006) also suggested that for teacher and school support to be effective, they must be planned and
implemented over the attendance span of the student in order to have an impact on potential student truancy. Students who were more engaged during one year were much more likely to be engaged the next (Akey, 2006).

Prior achievement was also significantly related to year two engagement; that is, students who had higher levels of academic achievement in the first year of the study were more likely to be engaged in school the next school year (Akey, 2006). Akey cautioned that a singular positive initial experience is not enough to sustain student engagement as the influences fade from one year to the next. Long-term success is dependent on supportive teachers and high-quality instruction throughout a student’s high school career. However, Akey (2006) recognized the value of any quality positive intervention. Based on these findings, an intervention that emphasizes supportive relationships, high and clear expectations, and high-quality instruction can make a difference to students at any point in their educational careers. Students who experience chronic absenteeism are near dropouts, and it is important to understand how and why these students continue. Lessons learned could be transferred to other students who succumb to the obstacles facing chronically absent students. What practices and conditions should schools employ and what institutional structural should be corrected? How can legislation be enacted to affect student attendance positively? What are the psychological and health needs of these students? How can the family be strengthened in order to assist them so that a burden of support is lifted from the student allowing the student to focus on academic pursuits?
Summary

Reis et al. (2005) stated that after a student has taken a negative course of action such as being chronically absent from school, it is difficult to reverse that trend. Poor student attendance, especially during high school, continues to be a critical issue of concern confronting both the nation’s communities and school districts (Heilbrunn, 2007; Henry, 2007; Levy, 2008). DeKalb (1999), in a review of the implications of truancy, declared truancy “one of the top ten major problems in this country’s schools, negatively affecting the future of our youth” (p. 1). Yet chronic absenteeism and truancy resulting in patterns of students temporary dropping out continues to be a national problem and serves as an early warning sign for academic problems, dropping out of school, and engaging in illegal activity (Entwisle et al., 2004; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Puzzanchera & Sickmund, 2008).

Although educational leaders have expressed heightened concern, it is difficult to quantify the full scope of chronic student absenteeism in public U.S. high schools. The difficulty of quantifying the scope of the problem is an extension of the inability of local, district, state, and national governing bodies to track, to compare, and to monitor chronic absenteeism data (Heilbrunn, 2007). Because local school districts have a poor record, data collectors completely miss and do not record many absences resulting in school districts fully comprehending the scope of the problem (Dekalb, 1999; Heilbrunn, 2007). Heilbrunn (2007) states because governing bodies lack the ability to monitor data it is difficult to compare chronic absenteeism data between districts and states. The problem has been constant and difficult to resolve nationally (Dekalb, 1999; Heilbrunn 2007). Compulsory attendance laws add to the difficulty of data comparison. The inception of
compulsory attendance laws, chronic student absenteeism and truancy has been and continues to be a major problem facing public schools in the United States (Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Williams, 2008). Compulsory attendance laws passed by States depending on the researcher data have either helped or hindered daily attendance.

The background review of reasons for or causes of chronic absenteeism and disengagement represent findings from sociological, environment, medical, psychological, legal, and government profession offers a narrow and one-dimensional explanation for school disengagement. Initial writings investigated risk factors and conditions seen as underlying causes and conditions and risk factors leading to and supporting high student absenteeism/truancy. Poor academic performance, malfunctioning family, behavioral conditions, frequent absences, or psychological problems have been identified as risk factors of student dropouts. The overall community becomes less proficient, and opportunities are restricted when students do not reach their full potential because they engage in patterns of chronic absenteeism/temporary withdrawal.

However, common acceptable risk factors in the literature are not perfect as identifiers of student disengagement and chronic absenteeism (Hauser & Koenig, 2010). Balfanz (2008); Corville-Smith et al. (1998) and Kearney (2008) reported that approximately 41% of eventual dropouts possessed one or more of the discussed risk factors. Some of the risk factors were internal to the student, such as a personal choice. Others were external such as a poor neighborhood.

Schools, social service agencies, law enforcement agencies, and the judicial system have implemented reduction models to mitigate chronic truancy in high schools
with varying success rates. These programs have moved beyond the *blaming the victim* syndrome to take a critical look at why students are chronically truant from school and are eventually identified as either temporary or permanent dropouts. Current efforts are designed to achieve one purpose; that of improving student success by retaining students and improving student graduation rates.

Current research invalidates the singular approach often used to identify at-risk and chronically absent/truant students (Balfanz, 2008; Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Kearney, 2008). Because of published critical research and exposure by the media, educators, school social workers, elected officials, parents, and lay people have a heightened awareness of the need to find solutions to the high rates of chronic absenteeism/truancy and school dropouts. Without effective solutions to mitigate student chronic absenteeism/truancy and school dropouts, bleak futures await these students. The adoption of Bronfenbrenner’s (1977) model of ecological child development provided a broader perspective to study and analyze as to why students become temporary dropouts, permanent dropouts, or re-enrollees. The problem of truancy and the demand for an educated society calls for a comprehensive approach for analysis and solution recommendation.

During my tenure as a teacher and administrator, I have witnessed many students who had made bad choices concerning school engagement. Failure to address the issues of temporary or permanent dropouts will cause ramifications for students, families, and society. Gaining a full understanding of how or why students return to school is difficult because substantial research addressing this concern is not available. The focus of this study is to understand how students overcome obstacles and situations that discourage
them from becoming high school completers. What factors motivated some students to correct and reverse their negative behavior regardless of the negative risk factors that they had to overcome were investigated in this study. The question remains: how do those who do complete high school overcome these obstacles.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate factors supporting the reengagement/reenrollment in high school to earn a diploma by students who were at some time in high school disengaged. This chapter presented the methodology used to collect and analyze data from the study. Described with this chapter is the research setting and participants.

Study Setting

The study setting was a large school district located outside a southern metropolitan area in the southeastern region of the United States. For the purpose of this study, the participating school district will be referred to as the Second Chance School District (SCSD). According to the local Chamber of Commerce, the county containing the SCSD was extracted out of Indian territories in 1832. Until 1970, the county was considered rural with a small homogeneous population. As population growth exploded at the end of World War II and accelerated during the 1970s, the county began to take on the characteristics of an urban county. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), the county’s population was approximately 688,000. The county has an extensive infrastructure including major road improvements and a transit system connecting residents to the metro’s major hubs and provides a complex system of services to the community allowing residents opportunities to improve their quality of life. In addition to an expanding infrastructure, major cultural improvements have occurred in the county in recent years. The residents are considered literate and have daily access to two major newspapers and a variety of other print media. As a large school system, the school
district’s 114 schools are responsible for educating more than 106,000 students in a
diverse, constantly changing suburban environment (the SCSD, 2012a). The public
facilities are diverse and address different student requirements. In addition to the public
school system, the county residents have access to a variety of post-secondary
educational opportunities, located either within the county’s boundaries or within easy
access throughout the metro area. According to the local Chamber of Commerce, 40% of
the residents are college-educated. The SCSD was selected because of its location in a
county with a diverse student population, economic diversity, and a variety of educational
options available to students. Table 1 compared the racial or ethnic composition of the
school district’s student body to the general community. The white population was the
largest racial group in the county. However, the SCSD now serves more minority
students than white students. As shown in Table 1, White, Asian, Black, and Hispanic
students are represented proportionately in the school’s population based on their
representation in the general population.

Table 1

*Racial and Gender Composition by County and the SCSD (March 2009)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>County 2011</th>
<th>School District 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>46.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Local wealth is essential to the funding of an adequate school program and the financial capacity for the county to generate the necessary wealth. The per capital income of the county in 2012 was $33,110, compared to the per capital income of Georgia of $25,134 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). According to the SCSD’s budget director, two thirds of local revenue is generated from residential property and the other third from commercial property. The county has a robust economy and a well-trained and highly educated work force. The business sector is diverse, including retail, service industry, public service, and manufacturing which are expanding yearly resulting in employment opportunities.

High residential assessments provided a broad tax digest, which increased the county’s ability to generate adequate revenue. The wealth generated from both residential, retail, and commercial taxes allowed the county to support the educational program of the county. The SCSD, because of its wealth, can provide additional finances.
to improve its schools through a variety of tax instruments, which are available to the SCSD for fund raising. The combination of racial and ethnic diversity and a well-developed system of educational facilities makes the SCSD’s schools a viable community to study. In addition, the economic base of the county supports a variety of educational opportunities for students. Academic variety in the SCSD adds to the appropriateness of using the school district as a laboratory to begin to answer the question why temporary dropouts return to school.

Students in the SCSD are exceeding the proficiency standard set by the state for Georgia High School Graduation Tests (GHSGT). The passing rate spread between the different subgroups is not wide on the English and math tests (see Table 2). The English language arts test shows similar results. A narrow range exists between the highest passing rates to the lowest passing rate. However, the pattern changed when comparing the results of science and social studies tests. As shown in Table 3, a difference of 23 points between the highest and lowest passage rate is evident in social studies. In science, there is a 21-point spread between the highest and lowest passage rate.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>90.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School district</td>
<td>84.7</td>
<td>93.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

GHSGT Percent Passing by Ethnicity/Race in 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity/Race</th>
<th>Math</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Social studies</th>
<th>Science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-ethnic</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Research Design

A statistical analysis is not capable of completely explaining the human motivation behind students making the decision to change their status from temporary dropouts to high school completers. To capture the human element for this study, a design using qualitative analysis was best suited. Interviews were conducted to determine student motivations for returning to school after temporarily dropping out. The interview process established common themes as to why students who were once temporary dropout changed their minds and return to school and work towards becoming high school completers.

Qualitative Research Design

The qualitative research design grounded theory framework guided the data collection and analysis of student interviews, administrative interviews, the analysis of student applications, and descriptions of study locations. Interview data were synthesized
and categorized to identify common themes and patterns of information that addressed the research questions. The study was designed to determine the major influences that cause students who were once temporary dropouts to return to school and become high school graduates. Results from this research provided a personal narrative to the discussion of why students on the path to dropping out of high school change their attendance patterns and re-enroll to complete high school. The following questions guided the student interviews.

**Interview Questions**

1. Do environmental, social, or structural factors encourage students to dropout?
2. Does the influence of peer groups cause temporary dropouts to return to school?
3. Do demographics influence change of status from temporary dropout to potential graduate?
4. Does the school’s culture and structure positively influence temporary dropouts to re-enroll?
5. Do dropout prevention programs positively influence the decisions of temporary dropout students to re-enroll and complete high school?

A number of practices guided the data gathering and analysis processes to establish study validity. Credibility is defined as spending sufficient time in the field to learn or understand the culture or social setting (Borgatti, 1996; Jones & Alony, 2011). The researcher has worked 20 years as a teacher and administrator with at-risk students who have dropped in and out of school on a number occasions. In addition, the researcher used prolonged engagement, which calls for extensive time to be spent in the
field observing various aspects of a setting, speaking with a range of people, and developing relationships and rapport with members of the different school settings (Borgatti, 1996; Jones & Alony, 2011).

Pilot Study

Pilot interviews were conducted to ensure clarity of questions being asked of the study participants. The interview questions were presented to a group of educational professionals and students prior to conducting the study interviews. One group consisted of three to five professionals familiar with truancy issues, and the second group consisted of students. The responses from both groups were not part of the final data analysis. The reviewed results from the two groups provided information on question clarity and relevancy relative to the research questions. Permission was granted by the author of the questionnaire protocol utilized in Reenrollment of high school dropouts in a large, urban school district (Berliner et al., 2008) (Appendix J).

Transferability was established by ensuring that a thick description of the research is included in the dissertation, explaining the research context and the assumptions central to the research. By describing a phenomenon in sufficient detail, one can begin to evaluate the extent to which the conclusions drawn are transferable to other times, settings, situations, and people. Confirmability was established by documenting through an audit trail the procedures for checking, rechecking, and reflecting on the data throughout the research process. A knowledgeable third party with experience with at-risk students and truancy conducted the check and rechecking.
Participants

Through the Institutional Review Board process for both the participating school district (Appendix B) and the University of Southern Mississippi (Appendix C), three schools agreed to participate in the study. For the purpose of this study and to protect the anonymity of the schools and participants, the researcher has renamed the schools as School One, School Two, and School Three. Selected students, counselors, and administrators from each of the three schools participated in the study. This section contains descriptions of the school’s students, programs, and administrators.

The principals at each of the participating schools granted approval for their students and staff to participate in the study through the Second Chance School District’s (SCSD) Office of Research and Accountability (Appendix B). Upon receiving permission to conduct the study from the University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Research Board (Appendix C), participating schools were contacted by the researcher to initiate the study.

Program Descriptions

School One. School One, located in the north end of the suburban SCSD, was a large school with a traditional curriculum, traditional programs and organization, and a traditional delivery model for instruction. In addition to the traditional programs of study and focusing on career education and college preparatory, the school is a specialized magnet program of international studies. School One has retained many of their white students but has experienced an influx of other ethnicities into the student population during the past 10 years. School One has a student population of 2,600 students, a teaching staff of 165, five counselors, two media professionals, one social worker, and
seven administrators. The campus is sprawling consisting of over 400,000 square feet of classroom and office space.

*School Two.* School Two served approximately 600 students (150 students per quarter) per year with the majority of students within 5-10 credits of graduation from high school. Historically, over a two-year period, the school racial composition consisted of: Black students 52%; White students 26%; Hispanic students 17%; and all others 5%. Students study the *SCSD’s* curriculum; however, the curriculum delivery model was computer- based with a facilitator, and program entry is noncompetitive. If students meet the age, discipline and credit requirements, admission is granted upon the completion of a registration packet. Students were required to be at least 16 because the school does not provide transportation. Each student is required to transport themselves to school. The digital academy opened for the first time during the Fall of 2010 making the conversion from the classical alternative open campus high to a digital format. The school was referred to as a digital academy because student instruction and assessment are provided via the use of network computers. Instruction and assessment were initially locally delivered and not web-based. The new format for the school created a blended learning environment of traditional instruction and computer based instruction allowing students to work at their own pace. The instructional format blended computer based learning with small-group instruction and one-to-one tutoring.

Three daily daytime sessions and a four-hour night school session were available to students, and they may select a class schedule that accommodates their work schedules or family commitments. Classes met four days per week and students were allowed to work at their own pace based on the individual learning plan. Teachers led extended
learning activities and small group activities supplemented instruction. The academic program was aligned to state adopted performance standards, met requirements for high school graduation requirements, and was accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

To enroll in the digital academy a student was required to be a resident in the county, be eligible to attend school, be at least 16 years of age, have earned a minimum of five units at a traditional school, and be able to provide their transportation. Annually, the academy was designed to provide services to 300 students. The instructional staff consisted of two facilitators, one transitions counselor, and one program director that was contracted by the SCSD to provide instructional services. The instructional staff was employed and supervised by the educational cooperation. The digital school staff was supported by the SCSD board of education with a principal, one counselor, one media specialist, and custodial staff. The SCSD’s role was to manage the facility, provide student support, and act as a bridge between the academy and the county’s traditional schools in order to enroll students. A private cooperation via a contract with the local board of education delivered educational and instructional services to students. The school was required to adhere to state standards, guidelines, and assessment expectations and protocols. The company contracted nationally with more than 240 public school districts in 22 states and the District of Columbia.

*School Three.* School Three offered a traditional curriculum delivery model within an adult education center model offering a high school diploma and a high school equivalency certificate if the student passes the General Education Development (GED) test. Ages of students that attended the program varied from young adult to seniors.
Although the population interviewed was within the traditional school age range (14–22), the young students who exited the traditional school setting were seen more as adults than as adolescents. The adult educational centers offered a high school diploma track to all students 16 years and older who were currently enrolled in a conventional high school program. Two teachers, an evening and day counselor, two examiners, and one resource center coordinator supported students.

Student Participants

Each school represented a cross section of students within the school district. The schools selected, with the exception of the traditional high school, consisted entirely of at-risk students who elected to stay in school by choosing an alternative route to completion. Students who enrolled in the nontraditional choice model schools were seeking certain characteristics not found in traditional school settings, for example, a smaller student body, a smaller facility, and smaller classes.

School counselors, administrators, or social workers at the three selected schools were asked to identify secondary school age students between the ages of 14 and 21 who entered their schools with (a) a profile or pattern of chronic absenteeism, (b) a history of temporarily being in non-attendance at school for 10 days or more, or (c) a record of reenrollment in high school at least once after temporarily dropping out. The final 19 student participants for the study were randomly selected by the school counselor for each school from the identified pool of students who met the delimitating criteria in their schools. The selected students for this study represented no particular ethnic group or gender.
Tables 4 and 5 provide detailed demographic profiles of the interviewed students from the three schools. Of the interviewed students, 5.3% attended a traditional high school, 47.4% attended an adult education program, and 47.4% attended an open campus high school, referred to as a digital academy. The study group consisted of 42.4% males and 59.9% females. The average age of the 19 students was 18.8 years. Thirty-two percent of the students worked and 53% participated in school extra-curricular activity. Racially, the interview group was 63.2% Black. Students participating came from two different alternative school settings and a traditional high school.

However, collectively the students represented a typical student attending a typical high school in the SCSD. The racial mixture of the study group closely mirrored the racial make-up found in the county. Black (n = 63.2%) and white (n = 10.5%) students comprised the majority (n = 73.7%) of the study group, which is the case in the overall county population. The gender mixture was even more reflective of the breakdown throughout the SCSD. Approximately 42% of the study participants were males, and the SCSD’s male student population was 51%. In Table 5 the detailed information tells the story that the students included in the study represented a typical student who was caught in the push and pull cycle associated with public education (Jordan et al., 1999). Based on field observations, the students were not impoverished nor appeared to be homeless. Students stated that they participated in extra-curricular activities or work. The data indicated that the students in the study group represented traditional regular at-risk students. Because of their normality, they may be considered representative of the concerns that many students feel who are in the middle of the crowd who may be at risk who are attending traditional schools.
Table 4

Demographic Profile of Student Research Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>(n=19)</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Attended</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional (School 1)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Academy (School 2)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Education (School 3)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>42.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grade Attended*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult Education Program</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>57.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

Detailed Student Participants Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ID</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Participate</th>
<th>Extra Curr</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>CD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AE</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>*11</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>JC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>AE</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>*9</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>JD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>AE</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>GD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>AE</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>*9</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>GD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>AE</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>*11</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>GD</td>
<td>GD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>AE</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>*7</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>AE</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>GD</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>AE</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>*10</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>GD</td>
<td>GD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>AE</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>*11</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>CD</td>
<td>GD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>GD</td>
<td>GD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>GED</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>MR</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>NR</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>CD</td>
<td>JC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>HS</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>JC</td>
<td>JC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>UK</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>ND</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key:  School Settings: T = traditional school; AE = Adult Education; and DA = Digital Academy
Racial/Ethnicity: B = Black; C = Caucasian; H = Hispanic; and MR = Multiracial
Family Status:  S = Single Head Household and D= Dual Head Household
Y = Yes    N = No    NR = No Response
Education ND = No Diploma; HS = High School; GED = General Education Development; JC = Junior College
CD = College Degree; GD = Graduate Degree; and UK = Unknown
*last grade attended by AE students
School Personnel

To determine if there were institutional factors supporting student re-enrollment, the counselors from school School One, School Two, and School Three were interviewed. In addition, the principal from School One and the director from School Three were also interviewed. The SCSD’s director of counselor services provided an additional perspective to the issues concerning student reenrollment. Principals and counselors were selected as candidates for interviewing because they were involved with issues affecting at-risk student reenrollment. The principals and counselors provided a local perspective on why students may reenroll in school. Central office administrators were selected for interviews to gather information from the SCSD level perspective regarding district factors that may contribute to students dropping out of school. Each person brought a unique perspective of the issues based on his or her years of service. Each faculty member interviewed had extensive experience in education. The SCSD’s director of school counseling and School Two’s counselor had 33 years of combined experience making their input valuable to the study.

Instrumentation

Three instruments were used to collect data for the study. A student questionnaire and two interview protocols were developed. The instruments are described in this section.

Student Questionnaire

A student questionnaire based on the Berliner et al. (2008) study was developed to determine why students leave and return to school (see Appendix F). Permission was granted by Berlinder (Appendix I). Students were asked to complete the questionnaire
prior to participating in an open question and answer forum. Nineteen questions sought demographic information, information about school climate, student decision-making processes in their decision to re-enroll, and factors that influenced the students to reenroll. In addition, the students’ responses to the survey questions and additional probing questions provided the researcher information on what frame of mind the students were in prior to dropping out.

**Student Interviews**

The selected students were interviewed at their assigned school using an open-ended format in order to determine what influenced their decision to correct their negative attendance patterns (see Appendix F). Three interview sessions were scheduled and lasted for over an hour each. Each student participant was provided a consent form to participate in the study (see Appendix E). As all participants in the study were 18 years and older, each of the 19 students signed the consent form after being briefed on the purpose of the study and prior to completing the interview. The researcher provided a verbal explanation and emphasis was placed on anonymity. Each student received a copy of the consent form for the students to review and to sign. The researcher provided a verbal explanation and emphasis was placed on anonymity.

After completing the questionnaire, students were organized in a focus group format and asked additional probing questions based on the questionnaire. The purpose of the focus group was to gather information on their thoughts and concerns about how they reached a decision to become active participants in high school again. Group questions focused on what factors helped the students change their minds to continue schooling. The sessions were informal, and the researcher solicited responses from each
participant. Some responded with extensive answers, while others had little to say. The interview sessions lasted for approximately one hour and were conducted in a conference room located at each school. The single student from the traditional high school was interviewed individually using the same questions and format used with the focus groups at the alternative school setting.

Administrator Interviews

Interviews of administrators (Appendix G) were conducted to determine the SCSD’s climate for re-enrollees and to gain an awareness of the SCSD’s issues surrounding dropouts and re-enrollees. In addition, the administrators’ responses to the interview questions provided information to discern if the school district had a centralized and coordinated policy addressing student reenrollment. The researcher was interested in determining if re-enrollment of students was decentralized and at the local school discretion. Data from this section provided information on the consistency of how re-enrollees were treated before they dropped out of school. Information was gathered through the researcher interviews with the administrators. Administrators were interviewed individually in their offices. Interviewees’ were asked a series of prepared questions concerning their department’s role in the student’s re-enrollment process. The interview process included asking a prepared set of questions followed by additional probing questions.

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process was conducted in seven phases. Phase One consisted of assigning a reference number, 1 through 25, to each student to maintain student confidentiality. During Phase Two the researcher assigned the corresponding student
reference number to each student’s questionnaire. The purpose of coding was to allow the researcher to connect student demographic data to student comments and statements for analysis purposes. Phase Three was the start of data transcribing from the student questionnaires. At this point, only demographic data were collected from the questionnaires and placed on a data collection matrix. For example, data on the student’s age and grade was extracted and recorded.

Phase Four included the process of compiling student comments and responses by reviewing and reading each student questionnaire, then extracting student statements from the questionnaires focusing on those items related to risk factors that encouraged or supported students to change their temporary dropout status and restart the process of being active students again in their adopted new school settings. Next was to move to Phase Five.

For Phase Five student statements and student comments gathered during the student interview sessions were transcribed. Paraphrased responses and verbatim statements that were taken during the interviews, were typed onto a data sheet matrix for review and analysis. Once again, the statements and comments were assigned a code associated with the student making the comment or statement for analysis.

For Phase Six all statements and comments taken from the questionnaires and interviews and placed on the data collections matrix for reviewed and analyzed by identifying reoccurring themes and connections to explain the changes in the students’ behavior that may have influenced the student in making the decision to return to school after temporarily dropping out. During Phase Seven, an analysis of administrator’s and
counselors’ interviews, were conducted using the process used to analyze the students’ data.

Summary

Nineteen students, three counselors, and five administrators were surveyed and interviewed to obtain data on why students reenroll in high school after extensive periods of disengagement. Students were observed and interviewed in their academic settings to gather data on what motivates students to reenroll and become reengaged. To gather data, qualitative techniques such as field observations and data coding based on a modified *Grounded Theory* approach was utilized for this study. The approach allowed students a voice in telling their stories as to why returning to school to achieve a high school diploma after facing numerous obstacles was important. Administrators and counselors were interviewed to determine if they could identify supporting risk factors as to why students reverse their negative attendance patterns and disengagement from school in order to continue a path towards graduation. Interviews from both students and administrators provided insights on the conditions and circumstances that create an environment potentially leading to disengagement. Because it has been determined by research that no one descriptor can explain student engagement, explanations offered by both students and administrators were considered specific to his or her experiences.

Chapter IV will report the results of the analysis of the data. Then Chapter V discussed the results and made recommendations for future studies.
CHAPTER IV
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the study was to identify factors supporting students re-enrolling or correcting their patterns of chronic absenteeism in order to achieve the status of high school graduate. To identify these factors, the researcher relied on the qualitative research practices. The rationale for the study was a result of increased accountability requirements placed on schools and educators by local, state, and federal agencies requiring schools to develop and implement adequate programs to curb chronic student absenteeism. For example, the passage of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), (2001) by the federal government personified accountability requirements for which schools were required to respond. (NCLB, 2001) required states to report truancy rates by school beginning with the 2005–2006 school years. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation was to add to the body of available knowledge on what motivates students to return to high school and to examine the barriers faced by these students as they attempt to earn high school credentials. Understanding why these students return is essential to understanding why they drop out.

Study Participants

 Nineteen students attending a traditional high school (n = 1), a digital academy (n = 9), or an adult education program (n = 9) were randomly selected from an identified population by the school’s guidance counselor and interviewed by the researcher focusing on what encouraged or supported their decision to correct their attendance patterns to become more aligned with obtaining a high school diploma. The student population identified to be considered for the study were selected by the school’s
guidance counselor based on the students’ attendance performance, status for originally dropping out of school, and having re-entered or returned to high school after dropping out. From the identified student population, the participants for the study were randomly selected by the school counselor to be interviewed by the researcher. Selected school administrators and school counselors completed perception surveys on students who returned to school after temporarily dropping out.

Qualitative Interpretation of Data

**Data Sets**

This section contains the results of the qualitative research questions:

1. Do environmental, social, or structural risk factors encourage students to dropout?
2. Do peer groups influence temporary dropouts to return to school?
3. Do demographics influence change of status from temporary dropout to potential graduate?
4. Does the school’s culture and structure positively influence temporary dropouts to re-enroll? and
5. Do dropout prevention programs positively influence temporary dropout student’s decisions to re-enroll and complete high school?

A survey/interview instrument (Appendix F) consisting of 20 questions was administered to 19 students attending a traditional high school, an adult education program, or a digital open campus high school provided data for this qualitative study. The five research questions were based on the concept of students being pushed/pulled out of school stemming from several identifiable risk factors than reengaging school.
Summary of Push-Pull and Reengagement Factors

The students in the research represented the concept introduced by Berliner et al., (2008) by leaving and reenrolling in school. The concept suggested that students become disengaged from school for many reasons, and they will eventually re-engage in schooling for a variety of reasons. Question 1 guided the research progress determining the push/pull portion of the concept and Questions 2–5 guided the research progress in determining the reengagement portion of the concept. Previous studies have documented the myriad reasons addressing the question of why students leave school and some have asked why students return (McGiboney, 2011; Raywid, 1994; Reis, 1998). For example, some students participating in the study group withdrew from school for as little as three months; whereas, others withdrew from school for an extended period of 18 months before returning to school.

Student reasons for periodically leaving (Table 6) and reengagement by re-enrolling (Table 7) in school were grouped according to the reoccurring themes of reasons for returning to school during the student interviews and surveys. The themes were determined after carefully analyzing the students’ verbal responses from the questionnaires and interview responses describing their actions and thoughts. Designation of themes resulted from a numerical analysis of how often students used terms and/or phrases as they expressed their reasons for returning to school. Summary data shown in Table 6 reflect the top three themes that emerged from student responses regarding the push/pull factors for chronic absenteeism from school. Of these reasons, school environmental factors (53.3%) ranked as the top reason for students being
chronically absent from school, while student internal decision-making (30.5%) ranked second, followed by medical factors (10.2%) in third place.

Table 6

Push /Pull Risk Factors: Reasons Cited by Students for Chronic Absenteeism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Number of Reasons for Chronic Absenteeism (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Environmental Factors</td>
<td>35 (53.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Internal Decision Making</td>
<td>18 (30.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical Factors</td>
<td>6 (10.2%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n = 19 participants)

For a qualitative study, all participant responses to a given question are recorded, analyzed, and reported using descriptive statistics, including the total number of all responses with the frequency and percent of each reoccurring theme used to report the findings of the study. The reoccurring themes that emerged from this study were based on the students' responses pertaining to the reasons the students returned to school or reengaged in school. These results are shown in Table 7 below.

The reoccurring themes that emerged in this study were based on 35 responses from the 19 student participants in the study. The most frequent reoccurring theme, student resiliency factors, was discussed 13 times among the participants and represented 37.1% of the total student responses. The two other themes that emerged were very close in frequency and percentage of responses, as cultural expectations for economic improvement factors ranked second and improved education environment factors ranked third.
Table 7

Reoccurring Themes of Student Reasons for Returning to School (Reengagement)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Number of Responses Per Theme (Percent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Resiliency Factors</td>
<td>13 (37.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Expectations – Economic Improvement Factors</td>
<td>9 (25.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family/Friends Influence</td>
<td>8 (22.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improved Educational Environment Factors</td>
<td>5 (14.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n = 19 participants)
Total Number of Student Responses = 35

Research Question 1

What environmental, social, or structural risk factors encourage students to dropout?

Push/Pull Factors: Most Cited by Students Explaining Chronic Absenteeism in High School

Three themes became apparent as to why the students were “pushed or pulled” to a path of chronic absenteeism from school. The themes identified were school risk factors, student risk factors, and medical risk factors. These have been presented in scholarly literature, and in those studies these risk factors and other similar ones were often referenced as “push pull” risk factors (Berliner et al., 2008; Bradshaw, 2008; Hammond, 2007; Henry & Huizinga, 2007). Students in the study expressed concerns and actions that fit the description of risk factors associated with chronic absenteeism espoused by researchers in numerous studies and by the U.S. Department of Education (1996).
Theme 1 – School Environmental Risk Factors. The most cited causative factor extracted from the student interviews for student disengagement were issues associated with the school’s structural environment. Environmental school risk factors most often stated by the students were what they perceived as unjust treatment by school officials, lack of guidance, social drama between students, and a lack of teacher accessibility and compassion (Akey, 2006; Harnett, 2007). Student number 16 clearly experienced the push factor associated with large traditional high schools because during the interviews, she stated with much conviction her sense of unfair treatment. The student started by saying, “That non-performing academic students were segregated within the same classroom from the high performance academic students and left alone to fend for themselves.” Student 16, a very vocal student was willing and ready to share with the group her traditional school experiences. “There was a lack of support from the teachers and a lack of communication between student and teacher.” The statement by the student implied that when there is a lack of communication between student and teacher, opportunities for intervention were missed (Railsback, 2004).

Student 15 echoed the lack of intervention, “There was a lack of assistance and I needed more structure.” Missed opportunities for teacher intervention and the ramifications are well documented by The National Center for School Engagement (2006). All interviewees stated emphatically that during their regular school enrollment interventions to improve their attendance, prevent their dropping out, or guidance on educational options were not offered. Henry and Huizinga (2007) reported intervention opportunities are not often readily available to students consisting often only of a phone call home from school officials.
Student 16 felt the sting of uneven application of policies and procedures by teachers and administrators. Hallinan (2008) suggested that inconsistent application of student behavioral policies are a primary cause for student disengagement from school. A push factor not very well documented is students who are pushed out of school without proper academic credentials because of their inability to pass statewide mandated test. Student 14, a special education student, was an example of this practice. As a result, the student expressed frustration and disappointment in his inability to gain admission to the local technical school. To summarize, the majority of the students in the three sessions agreed that timely interventions were lacking prior to them leaving school. Of the three groups, the adult education group was most emphatic about the lack of caring by their home-school staff, and the absence of a connection between themselves and school staff. They also expressed concerns about being pre-judged.

Theme 2 – Student Internal Decisions Factors. Studies have demonstrated that there are many external factors pushing students away from school, such as the school environment (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Kumar et al., 2008). Some causes of disengagement were the result of the student’s inability to make positive decisions. The inability to make adequate decisions was because students may lack of maturity, motivation, or are unable to handle peer interactions (Harris, 2009; Hartnett, 2007; Henry & Huizinga 2007; Looker & Thiessen, 2008; Terry, 2003). Student 10 expressed, “I stayed home because I didn’t like school.” Student 11 stated that he/she did not go to school because of peer pressure.

Research by Henry and Huizinga (2007) supports this position. In their study, they reached the conclusion that delinquent peer association predicted 21% of the
variance of truancy. A Canadian study determined that peers have the greatest influence on adolescent negative or positive decisions more than any other group (Terry, 2003). Still other students did not attend school because they expressed boredom with the school’s daily routine.

**Theme 3 – Medical Risk factors.** Students in the survey indicated they were chronically absent because of related medical issues. Student 12 responded to the question “why were you absent so often?” Answering with “a lot of doctor’s appointments.” In Georgia, (McGiboney, 2011) 10% of the student population suffers from asthma and have missed 470,000 school days. Chronically sick and absent students often suffer from depression or anxiety (Wimmer, 2008). According to Wimmer (2008), depression and anxiety are core traits of students suffering from the effects of *School Refusal Behavioral Theory (SRBT)*. He believed that his theory of school refusal provided insights into why some students are chronically away from school. Student 3 expressed, “I never liked school. Every day was torture for me cus of bullies and teachers.”

Based on Wimmer’s (2008) theory, these actions expressed by the participant clearly represent the concepts associated with *SRB* theory in practice and partially explains his/her being chronically absent from school. The positive side of their story is the ability of these students to overcome the push factor associated with school disengagement and start on the journey to reverse their directions in life.
Research Questions 2–4

Factors - Most Cited by Students Supporting Reenrolling in High School

To answer the research questions 2–4, students responded to the why they re-engaged their schooling, who assisted or influenced their decision, and what environmental risk factors aided their return or what factors assisted them in making the decision to return to school (Berliner et al., 2008). Reasons given for returning to school were varied: some wanted to be a role model for either their younger sibling or children, to graduate on time, or a yearning to satisfy a sense of self-fulfillment. The themes most often expressed for returning to school were; student resiliency (student-centered factors), cultural expectations - economic improvement, an improved educational environment, and family support.

Research Question 4

RQ1. Do demographics influence a change of status from temporary dropout to graduate?

Student resiliency factors. According to Reis et al., (2005), student resilience offers an explanation as to why students find the strength and motivation to change negative behavior to positive behavior promoting positive outcomes (Reis et al., 2005) such as re-enrolling in high school. Many of the explanations offered by students reflected this inner strength. Student 13 personifies this trait, by stating, “Felt like I just needed to get it done, personally obligated to do something about finishing school.” “I want to improve life-capable of so much more” was the feelings of Student 14. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), resilience offers a counter balance to negative factors faced daily by students.
Student 14 offered this statement, “While my school grades were terrible, but always attended school regularly.” This student received special education services and was unable to earn a traditional high school diploma but returned to school determined to receive educational credentials in order to pursue a post-secondary education. Another student shared with the group his/her need to reverse a family tradition by becoming the first in the family to graduate from high school.

Resiliency is not concrete and not very tangible but it is subject to change over time (Reis et al., 2005). Although the data from students concerning the grade they dropped out was incomplete, the data offered a window into understanding how students change over time. For example, based on the study participants’ responses, many began their pattern temporary dropping out in the tenth grade. However, now that some of the students are older they have reenrolled in school. The age data of the participants offered additional support to Reis et al. (2005) viewpoints that 100% of the participants returning to school were 18 or older which correlates with the average age of the study group. Conversations with a county administrator expressed a similar conclusion. The administrator’s experience of 18 years as a counselor to at-risk students saw how younger students dropping in and out of school were finally returning to school older and ready to graduate. Counselors from the three participating schools expressed very similar sentiments about student maturity and their desire to return to school as they become older.

Cultural expectations-economic improvement. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977), students will respond to broader cultural expectations that are part of the prevailing culture. Clearly, an expectation in American culture is to attend and complete
high school. One student expressed his/her concern about being stigmatized as a dropout. In addition, some of the students were aware of the value placed on being a role model. The student expressed a desire to be a role model for his/her younger siblings. The participants understood cultural expectations for economic improvement and success. The majority of reasons stated by the participants related directly to improving their economic status. For example, statements such as “Seeking career advancement”, “Want to enter college”, “Graduate on time” or “Increase earning potential” were examples of the students understanding the expectation fostered on them by society. The previous phrases represented the desires of responses during the interview. These students, based on their answers, understood the conclusion reported by Baker et al. (2001) that adults who were chronically absent during high school will work in low paying jobs, live in poverty, or use the welfare system more. Teasley (2004) also studied this issue and concluded that students who are temporary dropouts will lack job readiness skills and will experience lowered earning potential. Students 1, 5, 6, and other respondents understood the prevailing cultural expectation that as adults, they should work towards improving their lives as well as their children.

Research Questions 1 - 3

*RQ1. Do environmental, social, or structural factors encourage students to re-enroll in school?*

*RQ 3. Does the school’s culture and structure positively influence temporary dropouts to re-enroll?*

*Improved educational environments.* Student centered institutional factors such as open enrollment, alternative educational facilities, and support staff at the facilities
encourages the re-engagement of students in school (Looker & Thiessen, 2008). When asked, “Why did you return to school?” many students made comments suggesting their desire to be part of a school environment that was welcoming, non-judging or offered alternative teaching methods.

Alternative schools (Emery, 2000; Lange, 1998) addressed the needs of students who have not optimally benefited from traditional school programs. Ninety-five percent of the students participating in the study attended an alternative school. Connections existed between students gaining confidence and becoming resilient in a supporting environment. Hallinan, (2008) believed that resiliency is an interaction between individual characteristics and the environment. Elements found in a non-traditional school setting are extensions of the resilience theory framework (Halliman, 2008). For example, key components of non-traditional schools are opportunities for students to connect with a protective factor such as an adult (Reis et al., 2005). The author also defined protective factors as variables that promote positive outcomes. Student 2 shared with the group how caring the adult education staff was, “The adult education staff is caring people and that appeals to me.”

If the school environment offers psychological support and encouragement, students will show a strong attachment to school and improved social behaviors, such as improved school attendance (Reis et al., 2005). Eighteen of the students indicated that their attendance records had improved since enrolling at their alternative setting. However, Student 1, who continued to attend the traditional school, had not demonstrated improved attendance. Typically, non-traditional schools have curricular elements focusing on improving student self-esteem, fostering individual growth, and enhancing
social skills reflecting elements of student resilience theory. The academy and adult education programs provided extended scheduling opportunities emphasizing minimal multiple student/teacher contact, which reduces student anxiety, therefore, affecting student attendance in a positive manner (Veal & Flinders, 2001). Many students testified concerning their attachment and support of the school they were currently attending. The support came from the belief that they have found a school that accepted them for who they were. Student 11 replied to the question of why reenroll in school by saying “the digital academy is a good choice.” Another student #19 was seeking better academic guidance, which she found at her new placement.

In addition, the school’s structure and operations policies better fit their needs. The digital academy was a prime example of providing a flexible curriculum and structure. Some of the students indicated that the regular school day was too long and the alternative program offered an option of shorter days. At the academy, students were able to attend shorter sessions and fewer days during the week. The academy offered individual learning plans providing a curriculum that was tailored to the needs of the student for graduation. In other words, if the student did not need it for graduation he or she was not scheduled for it.

Research Question 2

RQ 2. Do peer groups influence temporary dropouts to return to school?

Family and significant others influence. Study participants cited parents, other family members, and significant others as having the most influence on their decision to re-enroll in school. Crosnoe and Elder (2004) reported educational resilience may be promoted when a student’s decision to return to school is supported by friends, teachers,
family, and siblings. During the interview sessions and questionnaire responses, family and other family members were listed 8 times as major influencers in changing their mind to re-engage in school. Family ties can encourage students to continue in an educational environment by providing support (Winfield, 1994). Because of family ties, Student 2 enrolled in the adult education program because of the positive experience by his/her sister. Parental participation in the student's educational process such as monitoring homework, test grades, and involvement in school organizations can reduce the probability of truancy (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002). Due to problems occurring in the traditional school setting, Student 16’s parents removed him/her from the school and enrolled him/her directly in the adult education program. The next most cited influencers were significant others (8), which were friends or boy/girl friends. Once again, Crosnoe and Elder (2004) recognized the value of peers as a balance against negative-related school behavior committed by adolescents. The support provided by family and friends may be seen as an extension to student resiliency.

Research Question 5

RQ 5. Do dropout prevention programs positively influence temporary dropout students' decisions to re-enroll and complete high school?

Administrative perspective. According to students, the re-enrollment process at the traditional school setting or at one of the alternative educational settings was easy to navigate. Administrators and counselors from schools who participated in the study also felt that the re-enrollment process for those who qualify was easy to navigate. County governance allowed local schools to construct re-enrollment policies making reenrollment at traditional high schools relatively easy. Generally, re-enrollment for the
student who had a good discipline record and was not aged out, according to a traditional school counselor, was easy. Student 2, a transfer from a program outside the district stated, “I was attending a GED program in another county and enrollment in this program was easy. I had my documents.” However, the SCSD’s counselor added another dimension; the previous counselor’s description applied to those students typically younger than 17.

Re-enrollment for older students may not be so easy in the traditional school because of decentralized policies and procedures. Major concerns expressed by the digital academy director, adult education director, and lead counselor, were the lack of alignment between local, and district rules for attendance. Additional, more seats were needed to meet the needs of the second chance student to provide a wider variety of classes and more flexibility from state regulations.

Summary

Chapter IV presented an analysis of the qualitative study guided by the grounded theory approach. The qualitative design used interviewing and survey techniques to gather personal narratives to the discussion of why students on the path to dropping out of high school change their attendance patterns and re-enroll to complete high school. The research established four themes suggesting reasons why students who were once temporary dropouts changed their minds and reengaged high school.

Reengagement of students based on the evidence provided by the students in the study is possible if three conditions are prevalent. The three conditions that supported student reenrollment and reengagement were (a) the presence of student maturity, (b) the presence of a role model, and (c) the presence of an inviting educational facility.
According to Harris (2009); Hartnett (2007); Henry and Huizinga (2007); Looker and Thiessen (2000) maturity and inner resiliency is a powerful force in changing student behavior and expectations. Positive interactions between peers may also alter student behavior from negative to positive actions (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002).

The student comments indicated that role models are important as students they example the possibilities of returning to school. Winfield (1994) concluded that positive family ties encourage students, by providing support, to continue engagement in the educational process. In Epstein and Sheldon (2002) stated that parental participation in the student's educational process can reduce the probability of truancy. Crosnoe and Elder (2004) established the value of positive peer contributions in resisting t negative-related school behavior committed by adolescents.

An inviting alternative educational facility is important to supporting student reenrolling in school. Raywid (1994) found that three characteristics often found in alternatives schools are: (a) they generate and sustain a community, (b) they make learning engaging, and (c) they provide the organization and structure needed to sustain the previous two situations. The three characteristics inherent in alternative structures is flexibility in the administration and the structure of the school (Raywid, 1994). A key component of non-traditional schools is opportunities for students to connect with a protective factor such as an adult (Reis et al., 2005). Students in the study expressed similar needs as they began the process of reenrolling in school. All of the students in their comments stated a composite of the three most reasons stated supporting student reenrollment and reengagement.
CHAPTER V
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Chapter V restates the research problem and reintroduces the research methods used in the study. Found in this chapter is a summary of the major results and implications of the study’s results. The purpose of this study was to examine what factors influence students’ decisions to change their patterns of chronic absenteeism, truancy, or temporary dropout status to re-enroll in high school striving to earn either graduation status or a GED prior to aging out. A qualitative research framework based on the grounded theory was used to answer the five research questions and to answer the central question–What major influences caused students who were once temporary dropouts to change to completers of high school?

Research Questions

1. Do environmental, social, or structural factors encourage students to re-enroll in school?
2. Do peer groups influence temporary dropouts to return to school?
3. Do demographics influence a change of status from temporary dropout to graduate?
4. Does the school’s culture and structure positively influence temporary dropouts to re-enroll?
5. Do dropout prevention programs positively influence temporary dropout student decisions to re-enroll and complete high school?
The study setting was a large suburban school district consisting of 16 public traditional high schools, a virtual academy, an adult education program, and an open campus digital academy. Nineteen secondary school students between the ages 18 and 21 currently with a profile and a pattern of chronic absenteeism and having a history of temporarily being in non-attendance at school for 10 days or more days who reenrolled in high school at least once, constituted one of the participants for this study. Nineteen of the selected students attended one of the following school settings; a traditional high school, an adult education program, or an open campus digital academy. In addition to the student interviews, school personnel-counselors and administrators from these schools were also interviewed.

An analysis of data extracted from student questionnaires, interviews, and administrative interviews was based on the grounded theory of qualitative research. The researcher conducted three student group questionnaire/interview sessions with each lasting 1.5 hours. Each session was conducted at one of the schools during school hours. School staff members were interviewed individually for an hour in their respective offices. The study gathered data using questionnaires completed by students and school personnel, student and staff interviews, and observation notes. Through analysis of the data, the researcher found evidence providing insight on the research questions.

Conclusion and Discussion

The students participating in the study possessed many of the traits associated with national statistics explaining chronic absenteeism leading to temporary dropout status. Participating students stated school factors such as environmental issues and negative student staff interactions as the primary reasons for being chronically absent
from school. Students made statements such as “Teachers don’t care.” Some expressed concerns about how rules and regulations were not consistently enforced during the school day and that there was a double standard. These statements support the study conducted by Hallinan (2008) study.

Another student stated, “…always wanted to finish school and I just needed a different way to do it.” The availability of alternative school settings acted as a factor supporting the return of students to school. The school district offered a variety of school settings: a digital academy, an adult education program, a night school program, and ease of re-enrollment procedures to the traditional schools. A student struggling in a traditional school wrote this statement, “I learned of the digital academy it sounded like the perfect program and opportunity to help me out of the struggling state I was in.”

On the other hand, the study group explanation for returning to school was based on improving their ability to find inner strength to change their lives with the support of family, siblings and significant others. The study found that the participating students as re-enrollees exhibited high levels of resiliency and support from friends and family. Student 18 felt that he was capable of so much more in life and was willing to get in school. Student 2 wrote on the questionnaire, “Yes, I actually attended my last day of night school with my mind made up I wasn’t going to fully throw in the towel but I was going to get my GED and make something out this life of mine.” Student 16 felt her parents always pushed her to achieve.

The top findings of the study were:

1. Many of the students left school during their sophomore year.
2. Top reasons listed by students for school disengagement are school factors, student factors, medical factors, and economic factors.

3. Many students have a strong self-preservation impulse.

4. Top reasons listed by students returning to school are inner resiliency, an improved school environment, and support of family and significant others.

5. Family and friends are very important to re-enrolling students.

6. If the re-enrollment process is easy to navigate, students will take advantage of re-enrollment opportunities.

7. Students want to be treated with fairness and consistency.

Upon reflecting and analyzing information and responses provided by the students, it was impossible to render a clear conclusion as to why students are “pushed” or “pulled” out of school. The reflection supported previous conclusions that no one descriptor can fully explain why students engage in the destructive behavior of negative attendance patterns. However, the students in the study shared many of the primary reasons espoused in numerous studies (Bradshaw, 2008; Hammond, 2007; Henry & Huizinga, 2007) and in a report by the U.S. Department of Education (1996) as to why students slowly disengaged from school. These risk factors identified by the National Center for School Engagement (2006), the National Center for Education Statistics (1998), and similar organizations act in combination to create an environment that enabled students to behave in a manner leading to irregular patterns of school attendance. In addition, many of the students participating in the study generally replicated a pattern of chronic absenteeism found nationally and could be identified by many of the risk factors of chronic absenteeism.
Reengagement of students, based on the evidence provided by the students in the study, was possible if three conditions exist for students. The three conditions that supported returning to school were the presence of:

1. Student maturity,
2. Role model, and
3. A supporting educational facility.

Three of the top four most frequently stated reasons by students to reenroll in school included:

1. Student resiliency,
2. Family and friends influences, and
3. Improved environmental factors.

An argument can be made that the top two reasons can be collapsed into one. Understanding self and community expectations are an extension of resiliency. Students, counselors, and administrators concur that maturing students begin to understand and recognize self, family, and community expectations and their interactions impact the multiple environments of their world (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). According to Harris (2009); Harnett (2007); Henry and Huizinga (2007); and Looker and Thiessen (2008) maturity and inner resiliency are powerful forces capable of changing students’ behavior and expectations. The results of this study showed that the confluence of the three factors identified by students: (a) the presence of student maturity, (b) the presence of a role model, and (c) the presence of a supporting educational facility, generated the necessary environment that made reenrollment and reengagement a possibility for students.
School risk factors were listed at the top of the U.S. Department of Education’s list of risk factors influencing students to stay away. Entwisle et al. (2004) and Berliner et al. (2008) summarized and compared studies of truants and permanent dropouts and reached the conclusion that the groups exhibit similar social, behavior, cultural characteristics, and attendance patterns. A concluding acknowledgement of these authors was there were no universal risk factors or traits that may be utilized to identify the potential temporary dropout. Hauser and Koenig (2010) proposed that common acceptable risk factors in the literature are not perfect as identifiers of negative attendance behavior. Although not directly related to chronic absenteeism, Balfanz’s (2008) research provided some insight into the value of using one risk factors to determine if a child is a candidate for school disengagement (Corville-Smith et al., 1998; Kearney, 2008). However, the results of this study invalidated the singular approach often used to identify at-risk and chronically absent/truant students. This conclusion supported the contention that a collaborative approach is essential to effect improvements in reducing student chronic absenteeism/truancy (Hartnett, 2007).

On the other hand, student maturity and inner resiliency have been identified as powerful forces in changing the student’s behavior, more powerful than peers on their behavior (Harris, 2009; Hartnett, 2007; Henry & Huizinga, 2007; Looker & Thiessen, 2008). Student responses in this study illustrated that, given the proper environment and support, they can make the transition from potential permanent dropout to high school completer. The transition begins when the students begin to make mature personal decisions, receive support from parents, teachers and significant others. An improved schooling opportunity such as enrollment in alternative settings solidifies the students’
efforts to succeed (Bryk & Thum, 1989; Lehr, 2004; Lange, 1998). Understanding the difficulty faced by these students when attempting to make the transition from temporary dropout status to reengagement is essential to the development of chronic absenteeism/truancy reduction and intervention programs.

Elements found in a non-traditional school setting were extensions of the resilience theory framework. For example, a key component of non-traditional schools were opportunities for students to connect with a protective factor such as a caring adult (Reis et al., 2005). Reis et al. (2005) defined protective factors as variables that promote positive outcomes. However, some studies focused on the role of non-traditional schools did not make the connection of their success with resiliency (Railsback, 2004). This condition supported the contention made earlier that a collaborative approach was essential to effect improvements in reducing student chronic absenteeism/truancy. Railsback (2004) presented evidence that effective truancy reduction programs should be comprehensive and address the causes of truancy, the family, school environments, economic conditions, and student factors.

Tables 4 and 5 provide detailed demographic profiles of the interviewed students from the three schools. Of the interviewed students, 6% attended a traditional high school, 47% attended an adult education program, and 47% attended an open campus high school referred to as a digital academy. The group constituted even numbers males and females. The average age of the 19 students was 18.8 years. Thirty-two percent of the students worked and 53% participated in school extra-curricular activities. With regard to race, the interview group was 64% Black. Students participating attended two different alternative school settings and a traditional high school. The student groups
from both the adult educational facility and the digital academy were predominately Black.

As the student profile for those who participated in the study was similar to the profile identified in the SCSD’s other public schools, the concerns voiced by the participants can be generalized to other students who attend similar schools. Even though the student participants of this study were in an at-risk environment, they reengaged in school in order to improve their lives and the lives of their children. Resiliency was a strong characteristic displayed by many of the students. Even with many of the students residing in a single head-of-household environment, they were able to return to school. During the interview, few mentioned being trouble makers while attending their traditional schools. The data indicated that the students in the study represented traditional normal at-risk students. Because of their normality, they were representative of the needs and concern of the invisible student, those unnoticed students who quietly drop out of school.

Limitations

The original research authorized through the local district and university Institutional Review Board (IRB) process included both a quantitative component and a qualitative component. During the study the researcher attempted to gather the data for both components as approved by IRB. However, the study was limited by the lack of quantitative data requested to address Hypothesis I: No differences exist among the following groups of students (a) temporary dropouts/re-enrollees, (b) students completing their education without interruption, and (c) permanent dropouts. The groups were to be analyzed based on the following variables: (a) student age, (b) family composition, (c)
socioeconomic status, (d) race, (e) ethnicity, (f) gender, (g) grade point average, (h) grade level, and (h) on-track for graduation with the identified cohort of students.

A cohort of students refers to a group of ninth grade students who start together and complete their high school experience within 4 years. Students who do not complete high school with their cohort may be classified as a dropout depending on the school’s attendance records. The researcher attempted to collect the data for this study requesting dropout information and the other variables related to this study. The only data the researcher was able to collect for the cohort of students was (a) absentee data, (b) completion rate data, (c) age, (d) gender, (e) race, and (d) grade level for the temporary dropouts/re-enrollees group and the students completing their education without interruption group for the identified cohort. However, none of data for the permanent dropouts group was available, as the students for this group could not be identified.

For Hypothesis I a comparative analysis of the three groups would have provided information that could have lead to an understanding of how each group responded to the “push and pull” factors (i.e., poor academic performance, lower socioeconomic status, or poor neighborhood conditions) associated with school enrollment. The school district included in this study was unable to provide cohort data for permanent dropouts for the approved schools included in the study; therefore, analysis of the quantitative portion of the study was not possible, thereby making the Null Hypothesis moot.

Although the research had been approved through the SCSD’s IRB process, access to the information regarding the socioeconomic data was denied by the County’s Management Information Systems. Additional requests were made to the Office of Accountability, the department responsible for local IRB approval. They were unable to
provide the cohort data needed to conduct the quantitative analysis of the data. The concerns were reported to the Dissertation Committee Chair and the dissertation statistician. After several attempts to obtain adequate data, the decision was made to proceed with the qualitative aspect of the research that was approved by the school district Office of Accountability and the university IRB. As a result, this study focused only on the qualitative component of the study.

As a result, of the lack and availability of quantitative data, the qualitative component of the study approved by SCSD and the University of Southern Mississippi’s Institution or Research Board (IRB) was completed for this study. Because of how the study was conducted and based on student responses, field observations, and the identification of patterns, a modified Grounded Theory of qualitative research was used to guide and analyze the study data. The modified theory was also used as a guide in the writing of the study’s conclusions and to postulate theories explaining the student’s behavior.

Another factor influencing the applicability of this study was the small study size focusing on non-traditional students. Limitation concerns associated with the qualitative aspect of the study are important to the applicability to other districts. Student interviews from the traditional schools were limited because of some students refusing to participate after being identified and briefed on the study. The expected participation of traditional students in the interviews did not materialize, thus limiting the application of this study to other traditional school districts. After a change of leadership, the third alternative school also dropped out of the study.
As one reads the literature on chronic and casual truant behavior, the wide differences among states on how data are collected and recorded becomes noticeable. These differences make it very difficult to observe and analyze the entire picture and full impact of chronic truant behavior in the United States. The lack of a complete picture handicaps any reform efforts that may be developed and implemented.

Recommendations for Practice and Policy

The purpose of the study was to examine factors that influence students to re-enroll and re-engage in school. The following implication for policy and practice are recommended.

Implications for Practice

Underlying issues of the study can be ameliorated with the following practices:

1. Instituting a coordinated approach involving local schools, social service agencies, and families;

2. Creating a school environment allowing for supporting older returning students;

3. Implementing interventions at an earlier stage of student development;

4. Developing peer-mentoring programs by local schools for students prone towards school disengagement;

5. Creating school environments designed to address the educational and social concerns of older students;

6. Improving accessibility to data by researchers.
Implications for Policy

Based on the results of the study, the following policy implications were indentified.

1. School districts should develop and support intervention programs designed to curb student chronic absenteeism focusing on non-punitive activity. The program implemented should be systematic, starting in kindergarten through 12th grade.

2. Legislatures should provide additional support to local boards of education to create viable alternative settings, especially schools addressing the needs of the older student.

3. Legislatures should re-access the impact of high impact state evaluation systems and their relevance to at-risk designated schools.

4. Legislatures should re-assess the funding methods for school and not rely on FTE counts and the primary determination of funding levels.

Recommendations for Future Research

Although the study results mirror many of the results found by other researchers, there is one outstanding characteristic of this study not addressed in previous research. According to Bronfenbrenner (1977) and others, many chronically absent students reside in improvised urban neighborhoods, come from dysfunctional families, or from single-family households. Many of the interviewed students did not fit this profile; yet, they have a history of being temporary dropouts.

There appears to be a dichotomy between what is assumed and what reality is with regard to student drop outs. Based on the literature review, the readers could reach the conclusion that students who are truant are poor, live in bad neighborhoods, and
participate in criminal activity. However, this study did not validate these assumptions. Additional study is necessary to determine why some students who do not fit the national profile disengaged from school. Many of the students worked, but it was not out of necessity. Future studies could investigate the question: Are there factors at play in the suburban area that are different from urban areas with regard to student drop outs?

Lack of transportation was not an issue for students in this study, although it is listed as a risk factor for truancy in many previous studies by Malbon and Nuttal (1982), Lan and Lanthier (2003), and the U.S. Department of Education (1996). Each student participant was responsible for providing transportation to and from school. However, none of the students expressed this as a problem.

Another area for additional study is the impact of chronic absenteeism on academic performance. Georgia has begun increased monitoring of truancy and has recognized its impact on grades. However, when inquiries were made about the existing data supporting the claim, only oblique references were made to studies. During this research many inferences were made about the connection between attendance and grades (Almeidi et al., 2006; Baker et al., 2001; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Entwisle et al., 2004; Gottfried, 2011). There appeared to be a lack of concrete evidence that truancy has a serious negative impact on grades and that intervention strategies were necessary to assist students.

Abundant research on truancy and its impact on children and society are lacking. Even less accessible is information on why and how children make a transition back to school. Berliner et al. (2008), Chuang (1997), Looker and Thiessen (2008), and Almeidi et al. (2006) expressed similar concerns about the lack of research. Looker and Thiessen
(2008) and Almeida et al. (2006) have added to the knowledge base, and hoping that others continue to research all aspects of truancy.

In summary, this study investigated the question: What is the relationship between students’ reenrollment and/or reengagement high school? The top three themes expressed by the students as a rationale for reenrolling and/or reengaging in high school included: (a) the presence of student maturity, (b) the presence of a role model, and (c) the presence of a supporting educational facility. Understanding why these students return is as essential as understanding why they leave.
## APPENDIX A

### STATE COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE LAWS


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Minimum Age</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Minimum Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>7–16</td>
<td>Montana</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>7–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>7–16</td>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>6–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>1899</td>
<td>6–16</td>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>1873</td>
<td>7–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>5–17</td>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>1871</td>
<td>6–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>6–18</td>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>6–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>7–16</td>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>1891</td>
<td>5–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>1872</td>
<td>5–18</td>
<td>New York</td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>6–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delaware</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>5–16</td>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>7–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District of Columbia</td>
<td>1864</td>
<td>5–18</td>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>7–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>6–16</td>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>1877</td>
<td>6–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>1916</td>
<td>6–16</td>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>1907</td>
<td>5–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>6–18</td>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>1889</td>
<td>7–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>1887</td>
<td>7–16</td>
<td>Pennsylvania</td>
<td>1895</td>
<td>8–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>7–17</td>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>6–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>7–16</td>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>5–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>6–16</td>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>1883</td>
<td>6–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>1874</td>
<td>7–18</td>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>6–17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>1896</td>
<td>6–16</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>1915</td>
<td>6–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>1910</td>
<td>7–18</td>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>1890</td>
<td>6–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>7–17</td>
<td>Vermont</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>6–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>1902</td>
<td>5–16</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>5–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>1852</td>
<td>6–16</td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>1871</td>
<td>8–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>1871</td>
<td>6–16</td>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>1897</td>
<td>6–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>7–16</td>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>1879</td>
<td>6–18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>1918</td>
<td>6–17</td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>1876</td>
<td>7–16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>1905</td>
<td>7–16</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

LOCAL SCHOOL STUDY APPROVAL

Second Choice for Second Chance
School District

May 20, 2011

Mr. Ralph Costen
1575 Loch Lomond Trl
Atlanta, GA 30331

Dear Mr. Costen,

Your research project has been approved. Listed below are the schools where approval to conduct
the research is complete. Please work with the school administrator to schedule administration of
instruments or conduct interviews.

[Blank]

Should modifications or changes in research procedures become necessary during the research
project, changes must be submitted in writing to the Office of Accountability and Research prior to
implementation. At the conclusion of your research project, you are expected to submit a copy of your
results to this office. Results cannot reference the [redacted] District or any District schools
or departments.

Research files are not considered complete until results are received. If you have any questions
regarding the process, contact our office at [redacted]

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

Chief Accountability and Research Officer
APPENDIX C

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI IRB APPROVAL

NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the “Adverse Effect Report Form”.
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months. Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 11033114
PROJECT TITLE: Factors Supporting Temporary Dropouts to Re-Enroll in High School
PROJECT TYPE: Dissertation
RESEARCHER(S): Ralph Costen
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education & Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Educational Leadership & School Counseling
FUNDING AGENCY: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Exempt Approval
PERIOD OF PROJECT APPROVAL: 08/03/2011 to 08/02/2012

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
APPENDIX D

COVER LETTER

Dear,

I am writing to tell you about my research study being conducted while a doctoral student at the University of Southern Mississippi. I am seeking high school students as participants. I am looking for secondary students between the ages 14 -18 with a profile and pattern of chronic absenteeism, having a history of temporarily being in non-attendance at school for 10 or more days, or reenrolling in school at least once will be the focus of the study. You will be asked to complete a survey lasting approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

I am studying the factors that encourage high school students to reenroll in high school after either being chronically absent or dropping out for a period of time. I am seeking information on the ease of reenrolling and what support was offered during their reenrollment process from, peers, family, and the school.

You will not receive any personal benefits as a result of your participation in this research study. It hoped that the results of the study will help understand why students drop out and reenroll in high school and what encourages them to return. Please contact me at 4044-494-9343 to learn more about the study if you have question. Your participation is voluntary. If you want to participant, please return he enclosed permission form.

Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Ralph Costen
Doctoral Candidate
University of Southern Mississippi
APPENDIX E

PARENT CONSENT FORM

My signature below indicates that I have read the information provided and have decided to allow my child to participate in the study titled First Choice for a Second Chance: Factors Supporting Temporary Dropouts to Reenroll in High School to be conducted at my child’s school between the August 2011 – December 2011. I understand that the signature of the principal and classroom teacher indicates they have agreed to participate in this research project.

I understand the purpose of the research project will be to begin to understand why students with histories of extended periods of absences re-enroll in high school and that my child will participate in the following manner:

1. Completion of survey and Participate in an Interview (30 – 45 minutes)

Potential benefits of the study are:
Provide knowledge as to why students with extended periods of absences return to school. The information will provide information to better respond to students, develop appropriate intervention programs, and to develop policies that encourage students to either stay or return to school.

I agree to the following conditions with the understanding that I can withdraw my child from the study at any time should I choose to discontinue participation.

- The identity of participants will be protected. Respondents to the survey will be given an alias and all responses coded.
- Information gathered during the course of the project will become part of the data analysis and may contribute to published research reports and presentations.
- There are no foreseeable inconveniences or risks involved to my child participating in the study.
- Participation in the study is voluntary and will not affect either student grades or placement decisions (or if staff are involved-will not affect employment status or annual evaluations.) If I decide to withdraw permission after the study begins, I will notify the school of my decision.

If further information is needed regarding the research study, I can contact:
Ralph Costen 1575 Loch Lomond Trl. Atlanta, GA 30331 lakehousecosten@hotmail.com

Parent Date

Principal Date

Classroom Teacher Date
APPENDIX F

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

Part I: Please provide the following information about yourself:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Type of High School</th>
<th>Family Composition</th>
<th>Number of drop outs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>T</td>
<td>AE</td>
<td>DA</td>
<td>PLC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

T = traditional school  AE = Adult education  DA = Digital Academy  PLC = Performance Learning Center  O = Oakwood High School

Where appropriate circle your information in other spaces please provide your information.

1. Why were you absent so often?
2. How many times have you dropped out and reenrolled? During which grade?
3. Prior to dropping out did you experience any intervention?
4. Why did you stop attending school regularly?
5. Did you participate in extra-curricular activity?
6. Why do you think others drop out?
7. Prior to dropping out did you experience any intervention?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home-school</th>
<th>Open Campus</th>
<th>Adult Education</th>
<th>Night School</th>
<th>Private School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part II

8. Was there an event(s)/situation(s)/circumstance(s) that caused you to change your pattern of chronic absenteeism/truancy and to continue with schooling?
9. What or who were the major influencers on you returning to school?
10. What are your goals when completing school?
11. How did you reach the decision to re-enroll?
12. What did you have to do to re-enroll in school?
13. Why did you re-enroll in your current institution?
14. In what ways was re-enrolling in school easy?
15. In what ways was it hard?
16. What are your goals when completing school?
17. Why do you think others drop out?
18. Did your friends support your decision to re-enroll?
19. What is the highest level of school your parent(s) or guardians finished? Circle all that apply.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>No diploma</th>
<th>High School Diploma</th>
<th>GED</th>
<th>2 yr. college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-year college</td>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father</th>
<th>No diploma</th>
<th>High School Diploma</th>
<th>GED</th>
<th>2 yr. college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4-year college</td>
<td>Graduate Degree</td>
<td></td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Protocol Instructions

The Student Assessment Survey for reenrolling students is divided into two sections and formatted to allow different individuals, if needed, to complete each section. The Assessment Survey was primarily composed of a few open-ended questions that are presented verbally by the surveyor. The surveyor may seek additional comments from the participants. Each participant will be asked to provide demographic information and the survey is constructed to allow for completion during the onsite visit.
APPENDIX G

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

1. What is THE SCSD’s role in re-enrolling students who drop out?
2. Does THE SCSD provide dropout prevention or recovery programs for students at risk of dropping out or for those who have dropped out?
3. What policies or practices affect the re-enrollment process?
4. What suggestions do you have to strengthen or change state/district policies or practices to improve the re-enrollment process for the SCSD?
APPENDIX H

LOCAL ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

1. What do you know about the characteristics of students who re-enroll in school?
2. Why do you think students re-enroll?
3. Why do you think students re-enrolled in your school?
4. Describe the re-enrollment process at your school.
5. What suggestions do you have to improve the re-enrollment process for schools?
Hi Ralph,

The protocols are not surveys and do not have reliability-validity studies. They are protocols used to guide 1-1 interviews. If you want to use them for your study, you have our permission to do so.

Good luck to you, and please let know if there is anything else we can do to support your work. Also, keep me posted because I look forward to reading the finished product!

BethAnn

BethAnn Berliner
Senior Researcher
REL West/Health and Human Development Program
WestEd
300 Lakeside Drive, 25th Floor
Oakland, California 94612
T: 510.302.4209
F: 510.302.4242
W: www.wested.org
Hello Ms. Berliner,
I contacted you in December concerning the Reenrollment of high school dropouts in a large, urban school district I know you have been busy. I would like to use the survey developed for the study. To do so what will I need to do? In addition, were validity and reliability studies applied to the survey? I am about ready to start the data collection of my work. Any assistance will be greatly appreciated. My phone number is 404-494-9343 and I may be contacted after 8pm. Thanks for your assistance.

Ralph Costen
REFERENCES


Looker, E. D., & Thiessen, V. (2008). *The second chance system: Results from the three cycles of the youth in transition survey.* Gatineau, Quebec, Canada: Learning Policy Directorate, Strategic Policy and Research, Human Resources and Social Development Canada.


Massachusetts General Court, Chapter 240 An Act Concerning the Attendance of Children at School. *General and Special Statutes of Massachusetts. 1852.*

Retrieved from http://books.google.com/books


No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, Pub. L. No. 107-110, § 115,


www.bls.gov


www.infoplease

Waxman, H. C. (1992). Reversing the cycle of educational failure for students in a at-risk
Baptiste, Students at risk in at-risk schools: Improving environments for learning
(1–9), Newbury, CA: Corwin.

to reduce and prevent chronic problems among school age children. Retrieved
from http://teach.valdosta.edu/are/Litreviews/vol1no1/williams_litr.pdf


Central Regional Educational Laboratory.


Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and
Delinquency Prevention.